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ABSTRACT

This booklet, which contains the papers, provides a variety of alternative points of view concerning the implementation of parent education in public schools. The first paper outlines a conceptual framework useful for differentiating between types and levels of educational change involving parents. The second suggests potential methods for implementing a comprehensive program of parent and family education. The third suggests some practical steps for implementing parent education in a way that will encourage local initiative. The fourth discusses organizational problems in institutionalizing parent education in the public schools. The fifth concentrates on four key questions that crop up in discussions of parent education and suggests how communities can begin to move at the local level. The sixth presents a number of criteria for successful parent education on the local level. The seventh examines the role of the public school in the parent's education. The eighth describes the California program as a model for parent education. The ninth examines the program characteristics necessary to bring about successful implementation. The tenth underscores the need for an informed and systematic approach as policy makers consider alternatives for implementing parent education in the schools. (MP)

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Families and Schools: Implementing Parent Education

Report No. 121
From the Education Commission of the States

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January 1979

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Foreword

Parent education, as the articles in this collection amply demonstrate, can mean many things to many people. For some, it is a school curriculum designed to prepare adolescents for their future responsibilities as parents. For others, parent education is a program of support, drawing on school and community resources, to help those who are already parents deal with the unceasing demands of child-rearing. Social activists embrace the concept as a means of fighting the alarmingly increasing rates of teenage pregnancy and child abuse, and of increasing people's tolerance for ethnic diversity by familiarizing everyone with the different approaches to that most basic of cultural functions, the raising of the young. Parent education may have goals as specific as teaching about the special problems of raising physically- or emotionally-handicapped children. It may also aspire more broadly to increase self-understanding and the ability to communicate within families. Needless to say, a national policy on parent education will have to be flexible enough to accommodate some or all of these objectives, according to the needs of the particular community.

Optimally, a program should serve interlocking functions. Consider the teenage pregnancy problem. By educating adolescents about the functioning of their own bodies and working to bolster their sense of responsibility and of control over their lives, we may go a long way toward eliminating unplanned teenage pregnancies. One role of parent education is to dispel any rosy and romantic notions teenagers might harbor about children as a never-failing source of joy and love. The field work component of any good program, in which adolescents work under supervision with a specific group of children, dramatically introduces the older group to the engaging and enraging childishness of children as well as to the responsibilities and frustrations of child care. Student field work can also provide staff for the day care teenage parents need to finish school A high school diploma, by increasing self-esteem and life possibilities, in turn helps prevent future unwanted pregnancies.

Similarly, parent education can help curb child abuse, both directly and indirectly. A number of investigators (Alvy 1975, Daniel and Hyde 1975, Elmer 1967, Gelles 1973, Hurt 1975, Newberger and Hyde 1975) have found lack of knowledge and/or unrealistic expectations about children's capabilities and understanding to be a common characteristic of abusing parents. Normal childish behavior is misinterpreted as intentional troublemaking, deserving of and in fact demanding punishment. Abusing parents often share a tragic ignorance of how little physical punishment a child can tolerate without sustaining injury. These findings alone demonstrate the need for parent education so that all parents will know about human

development. As the Exploring Childhood curriculum of the federally-sponsored Education for Parenthood project has shown, parent education can foster child-rearing attitudes "favorable toward the open expression of tenderness and affection, the use of mild rather than severe punishment, and the encouragement of a child's autonomy" (Gruendel and Gruendel, unpublished manuscript). These positive results stem from Exploring Childhood's joint emphasis on course work and field experience. The field work also familiarizes students with career options in child care fields as they work as student aides in day care settings. Thus, parent education programs may help to alleviate a desperate national need for child care, and thereby ease one of the family stresses that sometimes contribute to child abuse.

But it is not only to prevent child abuse and teenage pregnancy that we need parent education. Social and economic forces have brought about great changes in the American family structure. Due to the high incidence of divorce and of babies being born out of wedlock, many parents now raise their children without a partner. The rapid increase in the numbers of working mothers has thrust parenting responsibilities on fathers to an unprecedented extent. Because of the shrinking size of the average family, more parents have little if any experience dealing with children. We have become a nation of small, mobile, self-insulated families, isolated from the kind of support that used to be provided by the extended family or close community.

I conclude, therefore, with a strong but qualified recommendation to universalize parent education. In the first place, it must be truly universal. If it is offered merely as an elective in home economics departments, the people who need parent education the most will not take it. In fact, the group most likely to enroll in such a course, generally females already expressing positive attitudes toward themselves and toward children, are probably the ones who need parent education least. If we wish to promote a view of child care as a difficult but certainly important activity for people of both sexes, we must make a special effort to reach boys as well as girls. Either parent education should be a required course for everyone, or it should be incorporated into the curricula of existing required courses (e.g., social studies, health education, biology). The field work would then be part of a work-study program, or a separate course in and of itself. This brings up a second point. Without field work, parent education classes have been shown to have little impact on adolescents' attitudes toward children (*Exploring Childhood Evaluation Findings: Year Two, Practical Learning*, 1976). Therefore, any program that hopes to succeed must have a field work component. Thirdly, in seeking to prepare adolescents for parenthood, we must not ignore their own struggles to solidify their identities and to redefine their relationships with their own parents accordingly. Above all, we must teach without preaching. Child-rearing is not instinctive, neither is there any one "right" way to nurture a healthy, socially competent human being. Parent education if done well, can help to prepare young people for what may be the most demanding and rewarding job of their lives. The need for

such education is unquestionable. This volume provides a valuable service by addressing the controversy surrounding parent education and discussing the problems, in both theory and practice. The book marks a solid first step on the road to developing a program that may greatly benefit America's families.

Edward Ziegler
Yale University
January 1979

Introduction

Although there is controversy today over what the public schools should be trying to accomplish with the limited resources at their disposal, it is difficult to imagine any skill more "basic" than that of being a good parent, or any body of knowledge more crucial than that of knowing how to raise a sound family. In fact, as parents and families encounter new stresses and assimilate unfamiliar patterns of behavior at a rate we would have thought impossible several decades ago, more and more people are coming to feel that public schools have a responsibility to provide help where it is needed, to offer programs that will assist in the education of Americans for parenthood.

This conclusion — that schools should help people learn to be effective parents — is not a new one, but over the past few years it has been attracting increasing attention from educators, legislators and the general public. It is part of a larger issue, which is the proper relationship between families and the major supportive institutions of American society, such as schools, social service agencies and health care systems. That the relationship is changing is without doubt. The question facing policy makers is how to foster change in a direction that will strengthen the family and help to build strong communities.

Parent education is not one of the subject areas traditionally included in school curricula. It has, nevertheless, been appearing with greater frequency in recent years, either as an element woven into other subject areas or as a discrete course on its own. The numerous courses and pilot projects springing up in local school districts have not gone unnoticed among educational policy makers. Moreover, many cities have encouraged parent involvement through a variety of programs, some of which have had an impact on the schools. A few states have devised parent education strategies as part of their efforts in early childhood development and community education. And the federal government, which has already given the concept a strong push through the parent involvement requirements in national programs such as Head Start and Follow Through, is reportedly on the verge of considering a plan of action for stimulating the development of parent education programs in the schools. Moreover, the Children's Bureau and the U.S. Office of Education have for a number of years operated an "Education for Parenthood" program, featuring a model curriculum that has had a substantial impact on local schools.

The message appears to be that parent education is no passing fad. It is here to stay, and it is challenging public schools to reassess the scope of their educational mission. In view of the growing interest and the profound social values at stake, the time has come for serious consideration of the feasibility of implementing parent education in the public schools. In April 1978 the Education Commission of the States (ECS) initiated such a consideration by inviting ten educators, political leaders, researchers and social service professionals to develop their ideas on the subject and present them as a paper to a conference that took place at the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies in Aspen, Colo. Moderated by Jerry Lesser, professor of education and psychology at Harvard University, the conference sparked a lively discussion of priorities and alternative courses of action. The conference papers, although tempered by the realism of people who are well aware of the enormous

complexity of institutional change in education, are generally optimistic as they analyze pros and cons, barriers, strategies and — of utmost importance — feasibility.

This booklet pulls together all 10 papers into a single report. Educational policy makers and others who are looking for perspective on the subject of implementing parent education will find it here. They will not find any magic formulas, however, and this is because there are no clearcut answers yet, at least none that can guarantee successful implementation on a national scale. What they will find most useful is a practical framework for considering a major policy issue in education, as well as a variety of alternatives, and alternative points of view, on the question of implementation.

In 1976 another ECS publication, *Education for Parenthood: A Primary Prevention Strategy for Child Abuse and Neglect*, made some observations that offer a good point of departure for the papers that follow. The report said that families, parents and children exist as part of a larger social system that has tremendous impact upon the flexible, relatively unprotected family unit. Society has been changing rapidly, and so have families. Some of the indicators of social change:

- Sixty percent of American families are metropolitan residents.
- Many families move frequently, both short and long distances.
- Families are having fewer children. The average household size in 1974 was 2.97 persons. In 1973 the live birth rate in the United States was the lowest in history.
- The number of single-parent families is increasing, both because of divorce and because the parents never married.
- Over 50 percent of all women are in the labor force; over 30 percent of all women with children under age 6 work outside of the home.
- Stable, multi-age communities and the extended family have been replaced by communities linked by interests, age and income level.

These and other changes in the structure of our society, according to the earlier ECS report, have been accompanied by changes — and sometimes breakdowns — in the fulfillment of two basic functions: the way children are reared and the way parents and future parents learn about rearing children. Quite simply, people need more outside assistance than they used to as they learn to be parents and carry out their parental responsibilities. For although the rearing and early education of children has been — and still is — primarily a family responsibility, new patterns are emerging that point to the need for greater institutional assistance. Here are just a few, drawn again from the earlier ECS report:

- Many children are cared for outside of the home for part of the day. Some are simply left alone. The babysitter and day care center are as much a part of many American families as grandmother and aunt used to be.
- Child-rearing help from a spouse or other family member is not available to many parents. Isolation and frustration may result, with no one to take over and provide relief.
- Because divorce is usually a transition period between marriages, many children relate to two or more sets of parents, sometimes in quite informal arrangements.
- Technological devices for which no norms have been developed have been incorporated into child rearing and family patterns in sometimes deleterious ways. Television is the most obvious example, and the

unrealistic images conveyed by it and by other mass media do not correspond to daily living in a family.

What can public schools do to help parents and families? The 10 papers that follow move from the question of *why* to the question of *how*. Jerome Hughes offers the perspective of an influential legislator who, in his home state of Minnesota, has placed a high priority on community education and parent involvement, but who at the same time is concerned about maintaining the integrity of the family. Ira Gordon, dean of the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, comes at the problem from another angle, outlining a conceptual framework useful for differentiating between types and levels of educational change involving parents. In the conference discussion, Gordon emphasized the need to clarify the goals of parent education before plunging into program development, because different goals will pose different problems in implementation.

In another of the papers, Francis Roberts, president of the Bank Street College of Education in New York City, sounds a cautionary note about the ability of schools to accomplish a task like parent education. He also suggests some practical steps for implementing the concept in a way that will encourage local initiative. Douglas Powell of the Merrill-Palmer Institute in Detroit lists some concerns about the organizational dynamics of implementing parent education in the public schools, including one about core versus peripheral operations — the familiar dilemma of "hard" versus "soft" money — that is crucial as the federal role is discussed. Another of Powell's concerns is that there might be political friction arising from the fact that a fully implemented parent education program would expand the boundaries of schooling considerably, possibly encroaching on the "turf" of other human service agencies.

Bettye Caldwell and Betty Pagan of the Center for Early Development at the University of Arkansas answer some key questions that crop up in any discussion of parent education — whether it is necessary, what the options are, which of these are most practical and how communities can get started. Using a successful program in Little Rock to illustrate what can happen when there is strong leadership and coordinated planning, she argues that there is a *Zeitgeist* right now with respect to parent education, a national readiness to move ahead on this issue. Also focusing on the local level, Ruth Love, superintendent of the Oakland Unified School District, sets forth a number of criteria for program success. She is especially concerned about establishing a supportive, nonjudgmental environment for schooling, with the emphasis on personal growth, sharing and helping parents learn to cope with the "system," rather than on an institutional role designed merely to dictate and instruct. In this context, quoting a friend, she said in the conference discussion, "We now ask the schools to do what we used to pray to God for."

Moving to the state level, Mary Alice Kendall speaks simultaneously as a state board member in New York and as an experienced parent recalling the help she received when raising her children. An innovative program in California sheds light on the issue as William D. Whiteneck describes it from his vantage point of deputy superintendent for administration in the Golden State.

Taking a different approach is Oralie McAfee, associate professor of education at Metropolitan State College in Denver and author of the ECS report mentioned above. She looks at the program characteristics necessary to bring about successful implementation. Finally, Michael Lauderdale, School of Social Work, University of Texas at Austin, ties it all together with an analysis of how change actually comes about in education. His paper underscores the need for

an informed and systematic approach as policy makers consider alternatives for implementing parent education in the schools.

One issue that came up repeatedly in the conference discussion was the appropriate roles of the federal, state and local levels of government. There was general agreement that this is not the time for the federal government to pour massive amounts of money into programs and services — nor is such an action likely, given the current priorities of the Administration and Congress. What is needed most at this time is research and development to sort out the evidence on what programs work, where they can be replicated, under what conditions, at what cost and for what sort of clientele. Paralleling such an effort, the use of pilot programs, with an emphasis on local initiative and on the training of professionals, appears to be the most productive contribution that the federal government could make at this time. The conference participants were unanimous in feeling that federal agencies and Congress could be most helpful by providing incentives and reliable data on programs that work, rather than by prescribing uniform policy and service requirements.

The states can get into the act by reviewing their program priorities for education in light of the needs of parents vis-a-vis the rearing of their children. For example, one aspect that needs immediate attention, as Mary Alice Kendall notes in her paper, is the school-age parent. To pursue this example for a moment, a pamphlet entitled *Preparing Tomorrow's Parents*, released by the Public Affairs Committee, offers some evidence that will cause many legislators and educational planners to sit up straight in their chairs:

- One in every ten 17-year-old girls in the United States is a mother.
- In 1974 about 220,000 girls aged 17 or less gave birth, 15 percent of them for the second or third time.
- Estimates of the maternal and infant mortality rates associated with adolescent pregnancies run about 30 percent higher than those for mothers over age 20.
- Nine percent of teenage mothers attempt suicide — seven times the national rate for teenage girls who have no children.

While school-age mothers would constitute only one part of a fully implemented parent education program, their plight highlights the need for serious consideration of this issue by state policy makers. Legislation, appropriations, policy, guidelines, regulation, interagency coordination, technical assistance, evaluation — the states are right in the middle of the parent education debate. Many are already involved, at least to some extent, through early childhood education and community education programs. But it appears that the need is much greater than existing services.

Whatever happens in the state capitals and alongside the Potomac, local communities will shoulder the major responsibility if parent education is to become a reality in their school systems. The conference participants agreed that planning and coordination are essential at this level. There must be that tight network of cooperative relationships that is the key to bringing any idea to fruition within the institutional setting of the schools. There must also be a consensus on goals that will satisfy the social needs of the community, and these will differ from one community to another. It goes without saying that diversity in program design is essential, but all programs must be based upon an accurate reading of the developmental needs of the family. Institutional flexibility is likewise essential, but the schools should, as one participant phrased it, keep their claims modest because there is much that they do not know about the interaction of parents and children.

The concept of parent education suggests that the entire family as a unit, rather than merely the child who attends school, is the primary client of public schools in America. Families and schools, according to this reasoning, should enter into a closer partnership for the rearing and education of children. The following essays shed some additional light on the matter. They will be of interest to anyone who is intrigued, baffled, impressed or alarmed by parent education, and who wants to know more.

Parent Education: A Position Paper

Ira J. Gordon
Kenan Professor and Dean
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Although parent education has a long tradition, it has emerged only in the last decade as an issue for the federal government and state and local education agencies. The concern for parent education reflects changes in family structure resulting from social and economic forces, and accumulating data about the influence of the family on educational achievement. We have now reached a point where there are reviews that present the state of the art (Goodson and Hess, 1975; Gordon *et al*, 1975; Honig, 1975) and data about program effects both on preschool and in-school age children (Gordon, 1978). It is possible to describe program as representing three models: family impact, school impact and community impact (Gordon, 1977).

Family Impact

The aim of family, or parent, impact models is to improve the family's capabilities to provide the type of learning environment in the home so that those home cognitive and emotional processes that have been found to be related to child success in school (Hess, 1969; Gordon, 1970; Gordon, 1977) are enhanced. Underlying such efforts is a set of assumptions. Applied to parent education, these are that changing the parent, in some way, without changing anything else, will enable the children to do well in school, and that knowledge and attitudes of parents are keys to child development. In the middle-class tradition, the assumptions are also that the right way to rear a child can be learned from books, peers or experts, and that the parents, using these, can be successful child-rearers. To state these as assumptions is not to deny their power or validity. This model is the basic one for all formal education. The larger core assumptions are that there is a body of information necessary for life and for a career, that a teacher knows and teaches it, and that individuals learn and apply it. This view, which holds sway from "basic skills" to postgraduate refresher courses in medicine or education, is a legitimate and respectable approach. This model is the major thrust of most school-based efforts and of many state-supported child mental health and Appalachian Regional Commission projects (Gordon, 1977, p. 74).

With emerging concern for cross-generational efforts and parenting education programs for high school youth, the parent-oriented early education programs offer possible models for the involvement of youth in efforts that not only are socially useful in the community but also provide them with understanding of families and of child development in ways that should have an impact upon their own roles as parents. It would be rather easy to incorporate such programs, with suitable supervision, into a variety of high school efforts in which high school youth are trained as home visitors. Further, in the many places in which infant centers are located on school grounds, the activities developed in programs lend themselves to use in infant and early childhood centers (Gordon, 1977, pp. 74-75).

Further, it is clear that a child's health and nutrition, social and psychological development influence academic learning. The school is the only major continuous agency in contact with the family. The provision through the school of health services, counseling and guidance services, mental health services, dental services, what we call in Head Start and Follow Through and Title I comprehensive services, may be part of the parent impact model. That is, the school as an agency attempts to provide to the family nonacademic services and information that will enable the child to come to school more able to learn.

The September 1977 survey reported in the *Phi Delta Kappan* indicates that parents want schools to engage in parent education on drugs, alcohol, dating, etc. (Gallup, 1977). In other words, parents are seeking help from the school in the nonbasics.

Middle class parents, often through voluntary arrangements and proprietary programs, seek parent education. The PTA is now reemphasizing this aspect of its general mission of parental involvement with the public schools.

School Impact

The aim of this model is to modify the school through parent education and involvement. It is assumed schools will become more responsive to the subcultural values, needs and aspirations of the parents. If one holds this assumption, parent involvement then means involvement in the classroom and in the school aimed at modifying the teacher and the school system. One does not necessarily require through this involvement that parents will learn to improve their own teaching. The Head Start and Follow Through legislation (which required the formation of policy advisory councils and now requires policy councils), the community school movement, the legislation in states to require citizens' advisory councils, the current Public Law 94-142 on the education of handicapped children — all are reflective, in various ways, of the school impact model.

Comprehensive services, from this perspective, are still very important. The difference is that a school impact orientation also implies an agency impact orientation. That is, there should be parent involvement, or even parent control, of the delivery of services. In the parent impact model the family learns to deal with agencies as they are; in the school (or agency) impact model, the goal of parent involvement is to change the agency, to make it more responsive to the family as it is.

Community Impact

The third model, which combines elements of the first two but goes beyond them, is based on the assumption that the creation of home and school as effective learning environments requires not only changes within each of these agencies, and in their interaction, but also within all agencies and social, economic and political systems that impinge on them. In practice, this requires that parents play a variety of roles vis-a-vis the school, health delivery systems, social service agencies and the like. Parent education for such a model includes not only learning to make the home a more productive learning environment for children, but also how to engage in decision making about school and agency policies, how to use social agencies and make them more responsive, how to continue one's own personal education, whether formal or informal. This requires parallel education (or re-education) of professionals. Programs that approach this model are to be found in Head Start and Follow Through. Implementation of P.L. 94-142 will lead in this direction.

Policy Implications

1. Analysis of the data indicate that well-run programs of the family impact type are successful in increasing the achievement of children. We lack data on the second model, and there are gaps in our knowledge about the third. These gaps are due to the state of the art of evaluation as much as to program construction. Many parent implementation programs have elements of the second two models, so that it is difficult to assess the model as a whole. What data exist, however, support the notion that this is a powerful model for educational and social change. Indeed, the recent report by Ogbu (1978) for the Carnegie Foundation provides external support for such a model.

2. The concept of sponsorship in the design, execution and evolution of programs as demonstrated by the Follow Through approach is a viable and powerful vehicle for change. The 10-year experience in that program indicates that a continuing relationship between

program developers and consumers leads to program integrity and also has sufficient flexibility for adaptation to meet local needs and situations. Since parent education is different from adopting a new textbook or curriculum, and includes outreach activities, it seems even more essential that there be research, demonstration and diffusion efforts that use a model-sponsor approach.

3. National research and demonstration efforts need to be continued, with programs carefully designed, and the evaluation design must have the capabilities of assessing changes far broader than child test performance. Since the goals of parent education programs may be diverse, may include helping parents deal with nonacademic issues and may involve changes in home-school relationships, it is important that these elements be evaluated. Further, since there is still much to learn about program design, implementation and diffusion, national efforts are needed. However, our recent experiences with such efforts indicate the need to make the evaluation design a basic element of the program, not something developed after the fact, tacked on, conducted by those with no comprehension of diverse program goals, and subject to political or bureaucratic interference after it is under way. The stakeholders need to know in advance and be involved in the research and evaluation design.

4. Programs require time for development, institutionalization and impact. Working with parents requires fundamental changes in attitude and behavior on the part of school system personnel and other professionals. Programs should be funded for a minimum five-year period, with renewal for further years possible. Summative evaluation should not be rushed.

5. We have learned enough to encourage diverse local efforts to develop parent education programs, based upon the above models and using the resource people now in universities, regional laboratories and school systems. While national efforts to advance our knowledge are needed, local efforts can use what is currently known. However, we should not expect these local efforts to generate new knowledge or carry a burden of diffusion.

6. In carrying out local service programs and the local implementation of national research and development efforts, the following points should be considered: First, basic to instituting a program is a commitment on the part of administration of open-endedness. It must be understood that a program aimed at simply influencing the variables within the family and at changing the family's internal relationships to conform to some school norm, while it sounds to school people as reasonable, will have and should have such side effects as strengthening parents' self-concept. It will lead the parents to demand more of the school, and the parent impact model will irresistibly develop into a community impact model. If administrators are not willing for schools to change and teachers are not willing for their roles to change, then it would be best if they never got involved in parent involvement. The older imperial notion of imposing school on the home is an unworkable one. Therefore, the attitudes of the school people are the first consideration.

Second, the development of the program must involve the parents themselves. This does not mean starting from scratch, but it means that alternatives may be offered and reviewed, visits should be made to places that have programs, discussions of the relative merits should occur. Not all parents will want to be involved in this step, but it is probably well to begin with those organized groups of parents that currently exist either in PTA or PTA-like organizations in some schools, or with the community action agency parent groups in other arrangements.

Third, there ought to be choice of pattern within the program. We talk a good deal in education about individual differences. We have done poorly by it not only in the classroom but in our attempts to work with parents.

Fourth, there ought to be established a strong council, consisting of all the stakeholders — parents and professionals. Basic to good decision making will be training in how to work in groups. This may be at the level of Robert's rules of order or it may move up to sophisticated group process training. In any case, it is unreasonable to assume that either parents or professionals, placed together in a group, will automatically know how to relate to each other, know how to communicate and know how to arrive at program decisions. This takes

training, which both parents and school people need.

Fifth, program developers should shy away from orthodoxy. Each community should have several approaches from which families can make choices with the help of information as to the appropriate patterns of involvement for them. Similarly, teachers can make choices as to how comfortable they are, how able they are to use volunteers in the classroom and what kinds of training and assistance they need. They should be able to begin at the level at which they are willing to work with parents as they themselves grow in accepting and appreciating the richness that parents can bring into a room.

Sixth, all the successful programs had an educational focus rather than a therapeutic focus. All had materials, either prepared locally or purchased, that were sequenced in some fashion. There needs to be training of the people who are to work with the parents in how to use these materials.

Seventh, there need to be varieties of formative evaluations for seeing whether the program is on target, whether the materials are working and how they are being received. A monitoring management system is essential.

Eighth, another fundamental element of successful programs was that they devoted a significant amount of time to teacher planning and to inservice education of the personnel involved in the program. This is essential.

Ninth, attempts should be made to involve the variety of age groups represented in the community. An effective program may utilize junior high school and high school youngsters in day-care settings and as baby sitters for parents, so that parents can attend meetings or volunteer in the classroom. This would require training for the youngsters in child development and child care. This fits into what some people are calling parenting skills in the junior and senior high. It also may involve the use of "grandparents" as volunteers in the classroom, so that children may see such role models as supportive and useful, rather than as turned out to pasture. It should involve the professional groups in the community — the pediatricians, the dentists, the social workers, the clinical psychologists — in support services but also on the councils, so that they can begin to understand how the delivery of their services should change from the typical office or hospital model, in which the client comes to them, to outreach of "architect" models, in which they go to the client. This relates closely to the community schools viewpoint, or the community mental health center, with the concept that, especially for portions of our population, services need to be in the neighborhood, readily available, not downtown or in suburbia, in a large establishment where one sits for hours in the emergency room.

Conclusion

Efforts to implement all three models need to continue and be enlarged. Today our prospects are improved so that we can develop and use community impact models as well as continue and strengthen the other two models. My concern is that our efforts not be piecemeal, unsynthesized, small-scale and sporadic, but that they be placed in the broader social system context. We need to tie, where possible, parent education efforts to work, family income, and housing and zoning programs, medicare and medicaid, teacher education, professional education of social workers, psychologists, etc.

The American family, school and many elements of the system at all levels are in a state of flux. Change is not pleasant, and planned change is not always either possible or the outcome predictable. Further, change takes time. We need to ask ourselves the strategic questions. Why are we doing this? How does it fit into the larger social scheme? What do we hope to accomplish within the narrow confines of a specific program? What else ought to be done? What are our basic assumptions about people — what they need and want, how they learn and grow, what we desire for them? (Gordon, 1977, p. 78). These prospective questions face the Administration as it examines the federal role in parent education in the public schools.

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A Commitment to Parent Education

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We can amass a great wealth of evidence to support the claim that most of a child's future growth and development is shaped from the time of his conception until he reaches the age of 2. In his analysis of many studies of child development, Benjamin Bloom presents impressive findings that, on the average, 50 percent of the development of the measured intelligence of 17-year-olds takes place between 0 and 4 years of age. These very early years are of crucial importance because the foundation is laid — often irreversibly — for the individual's physical, emotional, social and intellectual well-being. Early childhood is when a child is most flexible and will respond most quickly and easily to any needed remedial services.

One of the most comprehensive studies, the Plowden Report, concluded that economic level and social class are much less important than parental attitude to education, books and reading as determinants of the achievement of young school children. Of course, educators have long been aware that the family generally exerts a more powerful influence on school performance than the school itself. For the most part, then, the findings of this British report came as no surprise. What is surprising is that while educators have recognized that the school cannot motivate children in the face of parental indifference, they have not called for a comprehensive national program of parent education. In view of the evidence, early childhood education without an accompanying program of parent education has been, and continues to be, a futile and wasteful effort. No matter how well conceived, well financed and well intended, an education program for children alone that cannot counteract the profound cultural effects of the home will not achieve its goals.

Paradoxically, the lack of interest in parent and family education comes at a time when it might least be expected. Most of our urban problems — unemployment, crime, swelling welfare rolls — are rooted in the sweeping transformation of the American family. Changes in the structure of the American home and family have been fairly continuous ever since the first Europeans settled in the Plymouth colony. Today these changes seem to be occurring so rapidly that the shift is no longer gradual. We have passed a definite turning point. This is the first time in our history that the typical school-age child has a mother who works outside the home. According to the Carnegie Council on Children, in 1948, for example, only 26 percent of married women with school-age children worked at anything but the job of keeping house and raising children. Now that figure has more than doubled. In March 1976, 54 percent worked outside the home, a majority of them full-time. Consider the number of children affected by divorce, a 700-percent increase since the turn of the century. Today about one of every three marriages ends in divorce, and more and more of them involve children. Although divorced people remarry at even higher rates, it is now estimated that 4 out of every 10 children born in the 1970s will spend a part of their

childhoods in a one-parent family, usually with their mothers as heads of the households.

Another significant change in familia' groupings has been the rise in the proportion of first births to women who have no legal marriage partners — from 5 percent in the late 1950s to 11 percent in 1971. Almost one million of these mothers are setting up their own households with their babies every year. There has been an eightfold increase in the number of single persons of the opposite sex living together in separate households. Communes are more common than they used to be, and each of these new forms demonstrates the flux in our cultural habits. Realistically, each one deserves to be called a family as much as does the conventional family form with husband as breadwinner and wife as homemaker.

Statistics only hint at the personal stresses that accompany these shifts. When mothers work outside the home, subtle changes take place in the relationship between the parents as well as between the parents and their children. Rising divorce rates both reflect and lead to complicated tensions. Divorce usually produces anger and a sense of failure for parents, issues of conflicting loyalty for children, and questions for everyone involved about whether the children will be harmed. And when both parents work, or a single parent is not around regularly, who is raising the children? Certainly not siblings, at least not anymore. As parents have fewer and fewer children, the days are over when young children in large families can be raised by older brothers and sisters still living at home.

Over the last two centuries, families have not only been shrinking in size, they have changed in function as well, and expectations of what families do for their children have also been reduced. Mothers are no longer automatically expected to spend the whole day with their preschoolers; fathers are no longer expected to train them in skills for a job. No one imagines that parents will try to manage a child's high fever without medical help or teach a 10-year-old how to solve a mathematical equation. Institutions with a great deal of technical expertise have grown up to take over these functions while parents have gone out to jobs that are less and less comprehensible to their children.

We now live in a society where parents must rely on others for help and support in raising their children. In a sense, parents have had to take on something like a supervisory role in regard to their children, choosing communities, schools, doctors and special programs that will leave their children in the best possible hands. Families today have drastically changed in their functions and powers, especially in their power to raise children unaided. The lives of parents have become so demanding and complex that the parents cannot have — and often do not want — traditional kinds of direct supervision of their children. Many of these former parental responsibilities have been given away.

The formal education of children was the first traditional parental role to be turned over to public institutions. In spite of its failings, schooling is the oldest and best established of "the family services." With the creation of the public common school in the middle of the 19th century, formal education began to replace family education rather than assist it. Compulsory, free public education was given many justifications, but among the most common was the argument that families simply could not educate their children for a productive role in the increasingly complicated American economy. Schools, it was claimed, could do what families were failing or unable to do: teach good work habits, pass on essential skills for good character and, in short, Americanize. Acceptance of the doctrine of common public schooling made a major inroad on traditional family functions. A public institution, armed with legal sanctions, was taking over and expanding traditional family prerogatives.

For a total of 14 to 16 years, the average American child spends the better part of most weekdays not in the presence of his or her family but in the presence of day care workers, teachers and other children the same age. It is hard to imagine a more crucial change in the role of the family. In addition to schooling, a whole list of other traditional family functions has been largely taken over by people and institutions outside the family: agricultural production, care of the aged, relief for the poor, the teaching of religious values, the care of the physically and mentally ill. Rising expectations for what we want to give our children accompany these changing family functions.

These shifts in traditional family functions do not leave families with nothing to do. Far from it. Parents have a demanding new role in choosing, meeting, talking with and coordinating the experts, the technology and the institutions that help bring up their children. The work involved is so familiar that we don't think of it in these terms. It includes consultations with teachers, finding good health care, selecting a reliable baby sitter, trying to monitor television watching and so forth. But parents today are no longer completely on their own when it comes to child rearing. In some ways the role of parents is analagous to an executive in a large firm responsible for the smooth coordination of the many people and processes that must work together to produce the final product. Teachers, doctors, writers of children's books and many others deal with a piece of the child. They are often more indebted to the interests of education bureaucracies, medical societies and the needs of advertisers and publishers than to the child as a person with unique needs. Only parents are in a position to consider each influence in terms of a particular child and to judge how these outside influences should interact.

The question then becomes one of helping parents deal with all the experts, the teachers, doctors, social workers, psychologists, TV producers and others who are playing a part in the development of their child's attitudes and values. How can the parent coordinate the professionals with whom they share the task of raising their children? How does the parent deal with the early childhood expert who is armed with special credentials and sometimes a jargon that most parents cannot understand? How do parents retain responsibility for their children's lives when they rarely have the voice, the authority or the power to make others listen to them?

First of all, in order to address these issues we must focus on structured programs for parent education in the elementary school attendance area. Public school boundaries are established and familiar. The attendance area is a basic unit that is close to parents and families; it is a unit in which people know one another and in which mutual interests and concerns encourage cooperation; it is large enough to provide a variety of services efficiently, yet small enough to provide a sense of community. The people involved are at the grass roots and meet one another face to face.

Funding for a community parent education project would most likely be available from a variety of sources, but cooperative efforts at this basic and understandable level encourage coordination with a minimum of bureaucratic red tape. They would also encourage maximum use of our schools and other facilities for the people in the community.

Second, I believe it is critically important to capitalize on the foremost national organization devoted to parent education — the PTA. In all parts of the country, PTA's are already organized and functioning within the structure of the local community. We have much to learn from parent-teacher group discussions, home instruction and, especially, local social-political action. It is no accident that, since the PTA was founded at the turn of the century, it has been instrumental in lobbying for such progressive reforms as child-labor laws, housing codes, and pure food and drug regulation. Political action and political education were integrated into the PTA's philosophy of parent education very early in the game.

Third, I think we have to realize that the notion of parent education is too narrow a concept. It is the family that is essential, the interaction of child and parent so basic to every aspect of human life. When we talk about parent education, we must take early childhood and family education into consideration. This ultimately involves the whole cycle of family development: adolescent dating, sex education, preparation for marriage, preparation for parenthood, infant development and care, care of the preschooler, helping the child adjust to the school environment, problems of the pre-adolescent, etc. The list is endless, and each area concerns a different stage of family-child and family-school interaction.

With this in mind, I would suggest the following as potential methods for implementing a comprehensive program of parent and family education:

- *Integrate family and parent education studies into all levels of the public school curriculum.* At every stage in the child's or adult's development, there is a readiness for exposure to some aspect of family and social growth. Junior high school students, for example, should

consider some of the consequences of early dating and early marriage.

- *Explore the feasibility of requiring or encouraging premarriage counseling for very young couples.* There could be some type of incentive built into the approach. Perhaps it should simply be mandatory before a marriage license would be issued. This does not seem unreasonable in light of the fact that we require testing and training before we issue drivers' licenses. Why not require preparation for marriage, since the institution is so basic to the stability of our society?

- *Seek funds and support for permanent institutes dedicated to the study of children and families.* These institutes would integrate the expertise of various disciplines: health experts, psychologists, writers, teachers, the clergy, social workers, government administrators, planners, legislators. The goal would be to develop an integrated and comprehensive national family policy

- *Develop community-based early childhood and family education programs that stress parental participation above all other goals.* Programs would be based in the local schools and would be voluntary. They would be funded directly by state and federal education aids or would be funded out of discretionary monies earmarked for special innovative programs to be developed at the local level.

- *Incorporate the functions of PTA groups into these new early childhood/parent education programs.* Many PTA members might be recruited to organize and coordinate parent education programs. These people might be paid on a per-diem basis or provided with a tax credit in recognition of other services to parents.

- *Consider the feasibility of providing a tax credit or some other incentive to all parents who actively participate in parent education programs.* One possibility might be to allow a parent who has completed a certain number of hours in a parent education program to teach or counsel a class in the school on the subject of parenting in the school, on a paid but part-time and temporary basis. This could be both a reward and an incentive for participation, and it would also benefit the children — they would gain from hearing the perspective of another parent besides their own.

It is clear to all of us that children, especially in the early years, are more influenced by family than by school, peers or anyone outside the family. All the Head Start and early childhood programs in the world are not likely to counteract the adverse effects of poor parenting and lack of nurturing in the home. It is just as clear the American home and family life has been changing so rapidly that it has reached a crisis stage. The traditional nuclear family is becoming less and less the norm. Families are getting smaller, divorces are on the rise, mothers are increasingly holding full-time jobs. At the same time, many of the traditional functions of parents and family have been turned over to outside institutions. Sometimes parents feel they are fighting a losing battle with teachers and the other family and childhood experts.

Our goal must be to help parents maintain a sense of power, dignity and authority in the rearing of their children. This is what parent education is all about. As stated in "Premises of Change" of the 1977 Carnegie Council on Children Report: "If parents have the power to do so, we believe that most of them will accept the long-term responsibility of caring for and supporting their children. By eliminating factors that undercut family life and make it hard for parents to function as parents, we are trying to create an environment where a truly responsible job of raising children becomes something that can reasonably be expected from all."

Education for Parenthood: Alternative Strategies for the Public Schools

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What makes us think the public schools are capable of taking on parent education? In my town, New York City, the schools are unable to mobilize any program adequate enough to allow more than 45 percent of all the students to acquire the most Jell-O-like high school diploma. Graduating kids from high school is hardly a new task for the schools, yet in our districts of greatest need, even minimal success eludes the schools. Having spent 20 years as teacher, school principal, and school superintendent, I understand some of the reasons for this, within the schools and outside, but the fact remains that the American school system has always been better at perpetuating the successes and failures of the society than it has been in modifying them.

The system itself has shown a remarkable resistance to change. School routines, practices and outcomes don't easily budge, either for good ideas or bad. If problems diminish in a particular school, the reduction is more often due to outside events than to in-school programs. And of course we all know the tobacco story. One state has for 100 years required that the schools "instruct pupils in the evils of tobacco and alcohol and in the humane treatment of animals and birds." I don't have data on the humanistic benefits these laws have brought for the birds, but we all realize that teenage smoking is hotter than ever. Thus, I believe part of the reason schools are so bad at solving social problems is the general impotence (or overrated importance) of most school experiences. I speak both as a professional and as a parent of three school children. Schools *can* make a difference, but they usually don't. They usually reinforce other factors — economic, social and personal.

The difficulty of getting results is hardly to be minimized. The process of moving a community to accept serious parent education in the schools can be like the War of the Worlds. The likelihood of bringing babies into the classroom is not too great in that large band of general America where school boards still seek to remove books from the schools. I chanced to be a superintendent of schools when the state I was in introduced a very modest family-life curriculum requirement. It fueled many a successful conservative candidacy for the board. Walter Mondale has often reported on the size of this lobby in relation to the Mondale-Brademas bills. On the other hand, traveling coast to coast with the national PTA and national March of Dimes in their parenting programs, I have spoken to representatives of perhaps a quarter of the school districts in the nation and found the enthusiasm high, at least at the time delegates were away from their home districts.

Another consideration or guide to action, if we believe the schools are the places for the action, is to give much more thought to the meaning, the

symbolic psychological meaning of what we do. The reason why tobacco education does so little is related to the personal meaning of cigarette smoking, in addition to its addictive nature. Already some studies of early pregnancy among the 11 to 16 age groups point to similar dark corners of the psyche of the adolescent in our culture. For many of these young parents, the desire for personal recognition through the act of having a child who needs them when the society in general views the teenager as redundant or worse is a strong factor.

Having established the difficulty of school response, let me raise the question of clarity. How clear are we of our purpose? It is necessary to decide on the relative importance of the many parts of parent education. In the abstract, perhaps few citizens would be unhappy with it. But what expectations do we have? What are we dissatisfied about today and what aspects of human behavior do we want to change? What organizational provisions do we want? What I'm reaching for is some clarity before we squeeze parent education into the crowded curriculum.

For example, the divorce rate is generally thought to be a problem. But is it? Some sociologists suggest it is a problem in some parts of the country, among some groups, at some income levels and not at others. Are any of the causes accessible to the schools? Although "worthy home membership" was listed as early as 1917 among the Seven Cardinal Principles of Education and has been floating around schools ever since, it seems to have had little effect on family statistics. Divorce may be more a public acknowledgement, even sometimes a healthy acknowledgement, of the fact that not all partnerships really work out, or need to. During adolescence and young adult life, pairs are always coming together and coming apart, often more filled with passion than the adult matings. Yet nobody seems to think it's anything but natural for high school and college kids. Somehow with adults, such splits are viewed as a sign of social decay. More valuable to me are some statistics on divorce among families with children. "High divorce rates," Berger and Newhaus suggest, "may indicate not decline, but rising expectations in what people look for in marriage and family life." In any case, how close is the divorce problem to anything that goes on in a school? What could schools do that would make a difference?

A lumping of other social problems into the box labeled "need for parent education programs in schools" seems similarly too all-inclusive. Especially since the schools are in a period when educational goals are being narrowed rather than enlarged, there is reason to be clear about what can be done. Arthur Wise, in an article in the *New York University Quarterly* on "The Hyperrationalization of American Education," notes that in schools and similar organizations, "measurable goals crowd out nonmeasurable goals." He continues to say that given a broad array of applications of a proposed policy (in our case, parent education) and knowing how hard it is to get any practical application, we will choose those things we think are measurable not because they are most central to the policy but because they do appear measurable.

Closely related to the making of policy is the apparent inevitability that decisions will be made on a more and more centralized basis. Sociologist Clifford Homans in his classic book, *The Human Group*, observed that "civilization means centralization." This is evident in the compulsivity of many large and small school systems, which operate on the apparent but simplistic assumption that there is more wisdom in the middle than on the edge, that the superintendent knows better than the principal what a school needs.

Writing in a splendid revolutionary pamphlet called *To Empower People*, Berger and Newhaus caution us not to assume that decentralization, on the other hand, is a real alternative to the centralizing tendency. They note that "decentralization generally is limited to what can be done *within* governmental structures." Their concern is with the structures "that stand between the government and the individual," one of which is the family. This conception of the mediating structure is important to the discussion of how parent education can take hold.

In talking about parent education in the schools, we are apt too easily to slide into proposals that deal at surface levels with the deep-seated ways of people. How they work

with their own children and how they are prepared for this are matters differing from one subculture to another and, even in these times, from locale to locale. We are dealing with personal meanings, with patterns of culture and ways of people, not with some technical need for information.

Given the ease with which everybody talks about parent education, yet the lack of focus to the topic, what are some of the strategies that might be considered? One could envision federal legislation as a first possibility. If anyone could agree on a program, it could, I suppose, be required. This seems unlikely, though, because we are talking about a program of many parts and because the family is hallowed ground. We might consider the cookbook strategy James Bryant Conant followed in trying to change the high school. The former president of Harvard combined his personal prestige and our irrational fear of Soviet space science with a terribly simplistic recipe for improving the schools, into a post-Sputnik cookbook that had no legislative clout at all, but swept into virtually every high school across the country. As a young professor in the late 1950s, I can recall dutifully traveling across the state to hear Conant, then retiring to my campus to pass the word to teachers and principals in training. I do not know just how to capture this strategy on behalf of parent education.

The states through their education authorities can of course play a large part. But then we fly full speed into the political fan. The states that have a real plan for parent and family education are hardly willing to admit it in these times of curtailment. The programs, in any case, are apt to be information-centered, a poor second to actual experience with children and the opportunity to talk about it. The curious fact about American schools is that they are very much alike from coast to coast, despite lack of uniform federal and state laws. What does this teach us? It shows that perhaps our strategy ought to be building on the principle of national programs locally determined.

One of our most vexing problems is that parent education is a generalized assortment of ideologies, curricula, programs and viewpoints. It is fueled by the best and sometimes the worst of motivations, ranging from guilt to elation, and touching on the most personal of human relationships and also rousing the most creative altruism. What we are asking is to think about a social commitment, but one that will be readily translated into program terms in 16,000 local school districts. Selznick, in his book *TVA and the Grass Roots* (1949), a fascinating analysis of social change and local effect, points out how great are the constraints on change when one begins with a formed commitment. He says that a commitment in social action is an enforced line of action; it refers to decision dictated by the force of circumstance with the result that the free or scientific adjustment of means and ends is effectively limited. This brings us to one of the forks in our road. *Do we want to start with the social commitment in its fullest abstraction, or do we begin at the grass roots?*

I propose the following. From my years as a local school administrator, I learned, not without some regret, that people are willing to make some substantive changes at the local level if two conditions are met: first, that they do not just get a printed request to do it, issued by some central state authority; and second, that they get the impression that everyone else is also coming to the conclusion that the change is needed and important. It is under such conditions that one finds much of the explanation for the similarity of all school programs across the nation. The additional great truth in the field of educational change is that consent follows money. All of this is sad but true. Few schools had guidance counselors at the elementary level until there was some federal support, then suddenly everybody bought the idea. There are a thousand examples.

For starters, then, I would propose that school systems develop plans to include infant and toddler and child care programs in the schools on a wide basis. The value of this would include:

(a) Public identification of the needs of young children.
(b) Arousal of interest and support among students.
(c) A laboratory for direct experience on the part of elementary and secondary school students. (I believe that *direct* experience with young children is the key for the most valuable part of

parent education.)

(d) Bringing young parents into the schools to be learners themselves about parenthood at a time of high motivation. (Parent education has its reality only to a parent, especially a new parent.)

(e) Focusing people on the fact that early childhood is indeed important for children and that the first three years of parenthood are one of the prime stress periods for parents. (The next largest stress period is the time when one is a parent of adolescents.)

Such programs in the schools will reap much goodwill among community groups outside the school system. The programs should experiment with multiple sponsorship and varied financial arrangements, including cooperative programs.

A second and related strategy would be to establish with school sponsorship a special parent education program for parents when their kids are nearing adolescence. In my experience, much of the stress of early and often premature parenthood among adolescents is due to stress within the home, induced unintentionally by the adolescent's parents who are on the whole unprepared to work through the myriad struggles of the adolescent and of the parents themselves. Parent education at that point becomes second in importance only to pre- and postnatal parent development.

A third strategy would be to build a non-school constituency for any program and seek to enlist the support and interest of the senior citizen, or at least those people whose kids have grown up.

Fourth, given the infectious nature of educational ideas, I think substantial coverage by the media, including regional, would help build acceptance. Schools are especially keen about the district next door. Of particular value would be publicity of actual programs now operating in schools. A recent example at Bank Street College occurred when a Parent Child Development Center we direct in Birmingham was given national television time. Within minutes there was powerful and immediate arousal of interest among legislators, school boards, parents and others. We do, alas, live in a media-hyped world and need to use that awareness in our plans.

Fifth, although I know this is asking a lot, I would urge a very different strategy from most state and federal efforts. Schools and families *are* hallowed ground in America, and feelings run high. I would urge a state and federal response that keeps a low profile on mandates and a high priority on strategies that encourage local initiation of programs. Relatively small amounts of seed money, with few strings attached, would encourage worthwhile programs ranging over the many needs, including information and informal networks, teacher education, parent centers in schools, community development workshops, etc. The key would be to enlist local effort and resources, especially the genuine and widespread human talent of parents themselves.

As a concluding point let me toss out one other possible strategy, that of *OBE*. It's whimsical, but like much whimsy it's really a test balloon. Recently a colleague and I spent a number of days in Washington shopping in that biggest supermarket of them all on behalf of the Bank Street-Pacific Oaks-Merrill Palmer Consortium. Every so often one of our official Washingtonians would say of a proposal under discussion, "Oh, that's OBE." Being good listeners and not wanting to appear naive in that city of acronyms, we said nothing for a while, but as more and more things became OBE'd we finally inquired. We learned that OBE, at least during that month in Washington, meant "overtaken by events." Somehow we have to put that to use in parent education. But I don't know how.

Organizational Problems in Institutionalizing Parent Education in the Public Schools

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Much of the attention being given to possible expansion of parent education in public schools has focused on curriculum and personnel preparation. Scant attention has been given to an organizational perspective on parent education — the process of organizing programs and the organizational nature of schools as it relates to parent education. This paper addresses major problems in providing parent education in the schools. While these are relevant to parent education, they are not unique to it. Indeed, they are characteristic of most educational and human service programs.

Organizational Boundaries

The dramatic expansion of the programmatic boundaries of public schools in recent years has prompted serious concern about the relation of school services to social and educational services provided by nonschool organizations. The debate over public school day care for young children, for example, has sparked considerable controversy between the education and human service professions. Parent education poses similar, albeit more subtle "turf" questions because it broadens the service boundaries of schools by adding new clients and altering the conventional relationship between schools and families. Depending on the scope of program services, school-sponsored parent education provides a potentially competitive entry into the network of human services offered to parents by public and private nonschool agencies. The pathway is an indirect yet significant one. Parent education efforts that address the social milieu of parents and the social-emotional processes of family functioning infringe upon child and family services provided by other human services agencies.

Like early childhood education, parent education brings new clients to schools and, through vague program goals, makes a claim on these clients in ways that can expand the relationship well beyond traditional definitions of education. All organizations constantly seek to increase their efficacy and justify their existence, and this usually occurs through improved and *increased* services to clients. Parent education gives schools a fresh and needed service arena. The issue here is the degree to which services aimed at this new client group are limited to conventional educational approaches or broadened to include a range of services (e.g., psychological counseling) that heretofore have been the province of other professions and professionally staffed organizations. Inter-organizational conflict may arise as schools (a) add new clients and (b) provide services to these clients that exceed conventional notions of education.

Ideological Tensions

Parent education programs have inherent ethical problems. Program purposes, especially the implicit ones, are primarily commitments to certain values, norms and ideologies. The diversity of child-rearing practices and differing

conceptions of the "ideal" person among cultural and socioeconomic groups in this country make the selection of specific aims of parent education critically problematic. The intentions of program personnel are bound to differ from those of some groups and individual parents. Whose intentions are to prevail? The ethics of intervention has profound implications for the degree to which parent education programs try to change parents and for the ways in which differing child-rearing values are introduced into the program. A larger ethical issue has to do with the right of professionals and agencies to intervene in the lives of parents who are perceived to be in need of educational services.

How do parent education programs and public schools deal with these ideological tensions? The typical response is to maintain ambiguous goal definitions. Public schools have a long-standing practice of utilizing vague goal statements in order to deal with the specific demands and concerns of special interest groups (Bidwell, 1965), and there is a history of parent educators using general statements of program purpose to avoid value conflicts with parents (Brim, 1959). Consensus on specific organizational objectives is difficult if not impossible to reach in communities where an array of ideological factions are represented and among staff in an institution or program where a variety of professional orientations exist. Vague program goals do provide the freedom to respond to new client needs, and they give considerable latitude to staff in dealing with clients. But vagueness also poses problems. Ambiguous goals may result in little coordination and integration of program and staff activities, making it impossible to evaluate the effectiveness of staff efforts and program accomplishments. Moreover, it is likely that staff members individually or collectively will have concrete ideas of what they are attempting to accomplish with parents, and it seems unfair to clients to keep these value-specific intentions implicit and hence unstated.

Ideological tensions and the accompanying ambiguity in program purposes are not limited to the community and institution levels. The personal goals of clients may deviate markedly from the goals of parent education programs. Consider the conflicts between a parent wanting to learn child behavior modification techniques and a program designed to enhance parent-child communication through approaches based on humanistic psychology. The problem of personal goals of clients is further compounded by the difficulty of converting personal goals to a common denominator that programs can then address uniformly.

Limited Data Base

The technology of parent education is limited. There is not a well developed body of technical knowledge that will guarantee the success of changing parent behaviors or of training personnel to carry out program goals. As is characteristic of human service organizations (see Hasenfeld and English, 1974), parent education programs have a high degree of uncertainty in (a) the extent to which desired outcomes are tangible and well defined, (b) the degree of invariability of the parent and (c) the empirical data on specific cause-effect relations in changing parents.

It is important to emphasize that vague program goals may be a function, in part, of technical problems. There are few reliable measurement procedures to investigate the attributes of parents that programs seek to change. Consider, for instance, the methodological issues alone in defining and measuring parent self-concept. The great variation in the attributes of parents also makes difficult the development of a research-based body of knowledge about parent education. Further, there may be serious problems if parent education programs are designed around erroneous assumptions about the characteristics of parents. Finally, the data on which programmatic approaches cause significant change in parents are inconclusive, and there is therefore much room for guessing about what might work in designing parent education curricula.

Goodson and Hess' (1975) recent analysis of 28 parent training programs underscores the limitations of empirical data on the effectiveness of parent education programs. While it was found that parent training programs produced significant gains in children's IQ scores, differences in the success of these programs were not found to be related to curriculum variations. What emerges from the Goodson and Hess analysis and others is that it is easier to produce effects in intervention programs than it is to identify the specific factors contributing to success (Lazar,

Hubbell, Murray, Rosche and Royce, 1977; Miller and Dyer, 1976).

Teacher-Parent Relations

Parent education programs revolve largely around the interpersonal relationships between parents and staff. Parent-staff interaction represents a large portion of the process by which parent education programs attempt to accomplish their goals. Since change and control are central functions of parent-staff relationships, varying degrees of interpersonal tension can be expected to occur. Unless participation in a parent education program is required, the extent to which parents comply with staff wishes is highly dependent on the ability of the staff to develop effective interpersonal relationships with parents. Parents can manipulate staff and, ultimately, withdraw from the program if their expectations are not met. The need to accommodate parent desires is something the teaching professions traditionally has not embraced (i.e., Waller, 1932). A recent sociological study of teachers and teacher roles suggests that teachers consider "good parents" to be those who abide by the teacher's rules and avoid intervention in classroom affairs (Lortie, 1975). It is crucial that staff of parent education programs change this attitude.

Another potential tension between parents and staff is the result of parental role conflict. On the one hand, parents are clients and are expected, at least theoretically, to adhere to the norms and wishes set forth by the professional staff. On the other hand, most parents are voters and constituents of public school systems and by virtue of this role have legitimate access to the policy-making mecnanism of schools. Certainly teachers enjoy less autonomy than other professionals such as medical doctors and university professors, and this tension may be reflected in relations between staff and parents.

Organizational Penetration

This issue deals with the degree to which parent education will become institutionalized in the basic operations of public schools. Organizations can be dissected into a core and a periphery. Peripheral areas are more responsive to change than are core areas. I can envision two scenarios of implementing parent education in the public schools. In the first, parent education is carried out on the periphery. Parent education programs are merely tacked on to school operations. A new cadre of professionals or paraprofessionals is trained to work with parents, and the parent education efforts are independent of other schooling enterprises. The second scenario is more intense and involves the core operation of schools. In this scenario there is a dramatic reassessment of the mission of public schools, with a new orientation to families and a tighter, more supportive relationship between classrooms and families. The entire parent-child system and the family become the focus of classroom activities, in addition to children.

These two scenarios represent the extremes of institutionalizing parent education. In the first, parent education programs could disappear without having had any impact on the mainstream of public schools. By the same token, programs carried out in this way might be more responsive to parents and families. Considerably more is required of schools to carry out the second scenario and reach the institutional core. Among other things, there would need to be a reorganization of classroom content and a retraining of professional staff. This raises a larger question: To what extent can or should public schools reorganize their structures and functions to provide education for parenthood?

Formal and Informal Systems

Parenting is a highly personal, individualized phenomenon that generally is learned through unstructured, informal processes and is supported by equally unstructured and informal helping systems. The issue here deals with the relationship between the formality of parent education programs and the informality of parenting.

Parents do not go about their child-rearing functions in complete isolation from relatives, friends, neighbors, clergy and coworkers. In fact, these latter resources may provide a significant support system for parents, serving as dispensers of child care information and advice and as supplementary care-givers. The problem is that the education and human service professions tend to diminish the significance of these informal helping systems when designing and implementing service programs. Many programs have failed in large measure because the existing resource networks of the client group were not recognized and

maximized (Sarason, Carroll, Matson, Cohen and Lorentz, 1977). Yet if parent education programs are to be concerned with the dissemination of information about parenting, research data suggest that effective dissemination makes extensive use of existing communication patterns within a community, integrating *formal* dissemination efforts with *informal* information networks (see Dervin, 1976, for review). The organizational issue, then, is the degree to which formal programs make use of informal helping systems.

Program and Policy Implications

These six issues and problems have several implications for the design of parent education programs. A major policy decision that public schools must make is the priority that should be given to parent education. Considerable specificity in program objectives will increase the likelihood of (a) an appropriate ideological match between parents and staff, (b) clarity in the roles and responsibilities of staff and hence presumed efficient use of personnel, and (c) an evaluation of staff and program outcomes tied closely to program goals. Program specificity will create firm boundaries for program services, which should facilitate the development of productive relations between school services and other educational and human services even where overlap exists. Program specificity also has liabilities. The greater the specificity, the greater the probability of reducing the pool of potential clients. Also, narrowly defined objectives yield little flexibility in responding to the needs of parents and ultimately might produce rigidity and resistance to change.

For policy makers the decision is a tough one. Narrowly defined objectives have anticipated benefits in the utilization and evaluation of staff, measurement of program effectiveness and ideological homogeneity of staff and parents; but they may also be characterized by a lack of flexibility and probably will reduce the number of prospective participants, therefore increasing the appropriateness of developing a number of specific-focused parent education programs. The benefits and liabilities of narrowly defined programs are simply reversed in broadly focused programs.

A second major implication is that there is a crucial need for expanded research and development in the area of parent education. Several of the problems identified in this paper could be resolved through program experimentation and rigorous evaluation. As a start, carefully designed and tested programs could explore alternative strategies for relating formal services to informal parent support systems, the effects of new staff roles and attitudes, and the determinants of the organizational penetration of parent education in the schools? Research on the organizational processes of parent education in schools is essential. For example, what accounts for the significant impact of a parent training program on the Tacoma, Washington school system (Gordon, 1978). Research-based program models that are evaluated systematically on a longitudinal basis, such as the Parent Child Development Center program of the Administration on Children, Youth and Families (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare), are needed to address the myriad issues related to organizing and implementing parent education in the schools.

Parent education offers public schools an opportunity to develop a new orientation to children and families, a new sense of what it means to serve a community's educational needs. The degree to which this can be accomplished, however, is directly related to the ability of policy makers to overcome the organizational problems identified in this paper.

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Universalizing Parenthood Training Via Public Education

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We are going to concentrate on four questions that crop up whenever a discussion of preparation for parenthood in the public schools occurs. And we are going to offer tentative answers that will help communities begin to move at the local level. Right now the inertia and resistance in the system are more likely to represent local rather than national problems. Thus we feel that the local level — with help from state and federal experts — is the place to begin. Our four questions are:

- Is parent education necessary?
- If so, what are the options for providing it?
- Which option is most practical and which one offers the greatest promise for accomplishing our objectives?
- How does a community get started?

Is Parent Education Necessary?
One hears literally dozens of reasons why parent education might *not* be necessary. We will mention 10 very briefly.

(1) *We know all we need to know about parenting; we are born with instincts that tell us what to do when the time comes.* But even though we are born knowing how to breathe, the first thing a singer is taught is how to breathe properly. We all know how to run, but the difference between a neighborhood jogger and a marathon runner may be knowing how to put the foot down properly. There is no skill we can develop that cannot profit from training.

(2) *Doing this will violate parental rights to teach their children about parenting.* People who assert this have not talked to many parents about their communication with their adolescent children. Even so, offering training in the public schools does not preclude the more intimate and personal teaching possible in the home. The training provided in school is never total. The home always supplies correctives related to such things as family values, ethnic traditions, etc. Also, such training will enhance the role of parents by helping parents become more effective.

(3) *There is no need to teach it, as kids aren't interested.* One answer to that is a flippant one: kids aren't terribly interested in anything else either, except themselves. Another is that preparation for parenthood meets the needs of the self much more completely than courses in history, government or apparently even English.

(4) *We don't know what to teach even if we did have such a course.* There is a common core of subject matter and value confrontation about which we could

have almost total agreement among educators and parents. Coward and Kerchkhoff suggest that such a course must cover more than child development; it should provide adequate recognition of the responsibilities of parenting. They add that parent, education courses should include:

- Discussing the available alternatives for guiding children's behavior.
- Developing the skills necessary to communicate with children.
- Exploring the effects children have on the marital relationship.
- Identifying personal value systems and recognizing their impact on the parent/child relationship.
- Appreciating the commitment necessary to be a parent.
- Experiencing supervised interaction with young children.

(5) *There is no one available who can teach it.* Teaching effective and responsible parenthood skills happens to be one area for which there is no state-specified curriculum at present. Home economics is clearly the closest, but teachers with training in psychology, sociology, drama and other areas have much to offer. The bulk of the prepation should come sociology, drama and other areas have much to offer. The bulk of the preparation should come task.

(6) *We cannot add another course without throwing something away.* The best way to handle that objection is to be very patient and say something like, "You do have a problem there, but I am sure you can work it out."

(7) *It is not possible to arrange the lab or practical experience component without ruining other classes.* In most junior and high schools, this is a real problem. The best way to resolve it is to offer child care on the premises of the school and have the program available as a lab for the parent education program. However, when people make the commitment, they can always work out other ways to achieve this.

(8) *There are no good curriculum materials available; those that are available are so expensive that we cannot afford to buy them.* Five years ago one could have offered this explanation, but there is now literally an explosion of materials coming on the market — and we hope this trend does not slow down any time soon. Most of the available "packages" are expensive, however. This presents a problem for many school districts.

(9) *There is no need to add a course, as we are already teaching this.* This is actually an encouraging suggestion, and we should listen when people say it. Some very creative secondary school training in preparation for parenthood has been going on in this country for 40 years. Those who have just discovered the field should not forget this. Most of the work has been done in home economics courses, and certainly most of the historical contact was with girls only. But rather than assuming that those approaches were not what we had in mind, we should learn from past experiences and build our future efforts on them.

(10) *We should not do this, as it is just one more example of watering down the basics in the curriculum; kids don't know how to read and write now.* Of course, there is nothing that says language skills cannot be improved by studying parenthood. We venture to guess that some fairly good writing goes into texts about children and parenting. Thus this objection should not carry much weight.

We have to be prepared to deal with all of these objections. As an example of help that can be provided at the federal level, we are ready to have fact sheets available (such as those that were distributed during the early days of Head Start) that would help local policy makers realize that they have the resources to launch a parent education effort.

If parenting education is necessary, what are our options?

For most school districts there are at least four clear options:

- Designing a new course that will be required of all students.
- Accepting (and possibly modifying) an existing course, now available as an elective, and making it a required course.
- Selecting content and weaving it into a number of existing courses in different departments.
- Offering the material at many levels during the public school years.

Whichever option is chosen, a local school district must begin by surveying what is

taught in all the courses that might possibly bear upon the objectives of a course in parenthood training. In describing how this might be done, we shall describe procedures that have been followed in Little Rock, Arkansas, where an ad hoc committee has been working on this for the past year. Several members of the committee went through all the syllabi and texts used in such courses as psychology, sociology, English literature, social studies and home economics. Although most of the teachers contacted for this survey said that they dealt with materials that bore upon parent education in their courses, the survey turned up little evidence except in the courses in the home economics department (child development, human development, adult living), psychology and sociology. To the surprise of some members of the committee, the material being covered in home economics courses dealt with most of the topics outlined in advance to represent what the ad hoc committee was concerned with. However, these courses did not reach all students by any means, and in some of the courses (human development being an exception) the proportion of girls to boys was about 3:1.

At least one outcome of this survey for our ad hoc committee was the decision that we did not have to go to the first option — design a totally new course — which would be the most difficult thing to do. In the various courses offered under the auspices of home economics, we had most of what the committee wanted to go into such courses, and the additional components could be arranged simply by modifying those courses. For us, the problem remained how to get it recognized as a required course, and at this point in time we have not solved that problem.

Actually, the insistence by representatives from different departments that "they were already speaking prose" was very healthy and to be encouraged. There are many ways in which the concepts of a course in parent education can be infused into other subject areas. For example:

- In literature, find a better way of teaching about child abuse than to study Joyce Carol Oates' poem, "Red Roses for a Blue Baby."
- In history, which is usually taught through conquest and war, include the history of the family, ways in which children were treated in different historical eras, etc.
- In psychology and sociology the development of the child always plays a part; it is impossible to deal with these subjects adequately without considering family and societal influences on the developing child.
- In biology, sex and reproduction are certainly a fundamental part of the subject matter, and the exciting studies of the behavioral ethologists always find their way into such courses.
- Health education is a subject in which much of what we want to go into parenting could be included.
- Music offers songs about children and their feelings, and art depicts family relationships — both offer much in the way of understanding the human condition.

All these courses have their own reputations with the students — hard, easy, dull, a snap, a cute instructor, good field trips, etc. — and we should be willing to take advantage of any such characteristics to increase the students' motivation to learn more about parenthood.

Before leaving this question, we would like to make a brief comment about the fourth option we mentioned — recycling the material at many levels throughout the school years. This appears to be the best option when schools are organized in such a way as to permit it. One of us directs a project in a special school in Little Rock that provides educational and social services for children ranging in age from infancy through fifth grade. This arrangement makes possible many contacts for the older children with the younger ones in a way that promotes both learning and altruism. This year, for example, the principal of the school and the coordinator of the entire early childhood division offered a unit in child development for all the fourth and fifth graders that included discussion, observation of the younger children, supervised practice in various types of child care, reading books, etc. A family-like spread of ages available in the same school can make possible many opportunities for learning about the responsibilities of parenting and for acquiring specific skills.

What offers the most promise?
We are not ready to offer any one single answer. What works best in one community might not work as well in another. Actually, most of the options are not mutually exclusive. The most important point is that parenthood training should be brought into as many courses as possible, beginning in kindergarten (or before, if such classes exist), but that some course should also be offered under a unified title. At this time no one seems to have come up with the perfect title.

How does a community get started?
Every community needs one person with authority to spur the establishment of a committee to plan a parent education program. In Little Rock a member of the board of education hears one of us give a public talk at which she made the recommendation that there be universal training for parenthood in our public schools. The board member asked the superintendent to appoint a committee to work out details of accomplishing this. Rather than particularize too much in terms of Little Rock, we will mention our recommendations of possible membership on such a committee. There should be someone from the board of education; the superintendent of schools or a top assistant; a representative of the state department of education; the directors of secondary education, English, social studies and home economics; interested personnel from local colleges or universities; someone from pediatrics, social work and psychology; parents of secondary students; several secondary and elementary principals and teachers; and several secondary students. Although students were put at the end of the list, this does not minimize their importance. Most people already offering parent education courses indicate that some students are highly motivated to participate (those who are already parents or are pregnant and those who are contemplating marriage in the very near future), but others can be resistant and uncooperative. As one teacher put it: "We have to bootleg information about parenting into the course, as the students are so full of themselves." It is to be expected, from what we know about human development, that adolescents are egocentric, preoccupied with themselves. But they are also idealistic and are showing increasing altruism. Such traits can be capitalized on in developing rapport.

Within a one-year period, such a committee can review existing courses, develop a syllabus, examine available curriculum materials and cope with the scheduling problems that appear when observation of live children and direct experience with children are part of the package. In planning such a course, we should not forget the concept of community education. There are many facilities in each community that can offer a great deal of help — child care centers, nursery schools and so forth.

Then as a last step, someone has to be empowered to take action, to communicate with principals and teachers, to design inservice courses, to deploy materials. Although the prime mover of such action is important, the person who keeps moving along through all the essential steps to program operation is even more important.

Summary
These suggestions represent practical steps to begin the task of implementing parent education in the public schools. We feel that there is now a *Zeitgeist* that indicates a national readiness for such a venture. Furthermore, although there is still not much variety available, curriculum materials that can be used or adapted are available, and people who are eager to implement this kind of approach can be found in most states. Although in most communities there will be some foot-dragging, some timidity and some anxiety, many schools are ready to move. We feel that the simple steps outlined in this paper will help them get into motion.

Parents and Public Schools: Partners in Education

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The results of the Ninth Annual Gallup Poll on the public's attitude toward public schools deserve our serious attention. Throughout the nation, the poll revealed that there was a wide acceptance of the view that parents must work closely with the schools if students are to reach their full educational potential. More than three in every four adults polled said they approved of the idea of offering courses to parents as a regular part of the public school system. "It probably is no exaggeration to say that the next great advance in education will come when parents and teachers work as a team, with parents taking full responsibility for problems that arise in the home," said the poll.

With that in mind, I believe we are faced not with the choice of whether to provide parent education programs, but with the responsibility of deciding how best to begin establishing and implementing those programs. The societal changes that have taken place in the last 20 years have placed new responsibilities on educators to foster a positive cultural and personal identification for students — an identification our society, our communities and the families have sometimes failed to provide. Parents are now seeking professional advice in areas in which they formerly relied on their own instincts or judgments. Relatives and family ties formerly played a major role in providing support for young parents and in passing along parenting skills. With the mobility of today's society, however, many young parents live far from their extended families, the number of working mothers has doubled, and single-parent families have increased by 20 percent.

For some 20 years now, we in education have tried — without too much success — to be all things to all people. We've been forced to do this for a variety of complex reasons, but the fact has been that people, as one friend of mine puts it, "have asked of their schools what they used to pray to God for." But schools have not been masters of their own destinies. They merely reflect the social climate in which they exist. Many factors impinge from without and have a direct bearing on the quality of education a school can provide. Therefore, parents, with the in-depth and long-term knowledge of the child — the child's strengths and weaknesses, needs and desires — are an important and critical aspect of the educational process.

I believe the educational system has a responsibility to be responsive to the citizens of tomorrow by providing the parents of today with the assistance they need in helping their child reach his or her fullest potential. Put simply, I believe it is time for our methods to catch up with our mandate. There is a great deal of talk about parent education, but a viable program is a very different matter. To develop, establish and maintain a quality parent education program is a significant challenge.

In general, parent education classes should provide a supportive, nonjudgmental environment where parents feel free to investigate and discuss creative options for dealing with their child's social, emotional and physical growth. While the participants should receive information on child growth and development, the personal growth of each parent also should be emphasized. Parents should be encouraged to recognize their own responsibility for promoting optimal growth in their child. They should be encouraged to develop ideas and techniques for use in the home that will stimulate the child's physical, emotional, social and academic development.

Based on the knowledge of growth patterns and with sensitivity to each child's uniqueness, parent education classes should assist parents to set realistic expectations for their child. They should provide opportunities for sharing and appreciating the different cultural values held by various ethnic groups in the community. Parents should be provided with an opportunity, through the classes, to practice a broad variety of skills in communications, problem solving and other areas that may be used to enhance family relations. Additionally, classes should assist parents in learning to deal effectively with school-parent concerns, conferences and so on, in a manner that will promote maximum learning environments. Specifically, parent education classes should have:

- Well-defined, measurable objectives.
- Specific motivational strategies.
- Curriculum relevant to the diversity of parents — culturally, ethnically and economically.
- Techniques for insuring continuity.
- Methods for ongoing documentation and assessment.
- Provisions for evaluation — both formal and informal.

In addition, parent education programs should be responsive to the needs of the school district's individual department; increase parents' knowledge and their ability to effectively assist their child in the learning process; be dependent upon the interests, needs and desires of the parents; assist each individual parent to fulfill his or her own potential; and help parents to understand the complexities of education.

Parent education classes can be presented in a variety of forms. Successful parent education classes can include:

- Parent participation in which parents, after a period of orientation, work directly with children in the classroom under the guidance of a teacher skilled in working both with parents and children.
- Small discussion groups, meeting with an acceptable course content.
- Informational meetings held under the lecture and forum provisions of adult education.
- Film series or book reviews used as the basis for classes.
- Training of parents as paid or volunteer aides for classroom participation.
- Classes or forums designed to acquaint community members with the goals and procedures of school programs.
- Child observation in connection with a variety of school activities, followed by guided parent discussions.
- Parent reading and discussion groups.
- Classes for parents of exceptional children to foster an understanding and acceptance of handicapped children.
- Combined parent-teacher workshops.
- Family outdoor education, emphasizing living, learning and playing together.

Once a districtwide thrust for parent education programs has been agreed upon, here are some suggestions to help insure that participation and support is maximized. Administrative and staff attitudes are crucial and can determine whether or not parents become successfully involved. Attitudes must reflect a genuine interest in and support of both parent education and parent participation. Other suggestions:

- Work with school administrators, staff, teachers, auxiliary and resource people to facilitate the maximum effectiveness of the community.
- Meet with principals — formally and informally — and enlist their help in encouraging parent involvement and participation.
- Meet with teachers to enlist their support. Interpret to teachers how parent education classes can support them in their efforts.
- Utilize enthusiastic school site members to teach, participate in and support

parent education classes.

- Work with community agencies to help meet the total needs of the parents.
- Provide a place for parents at the school site through a "parent room," emphasizing that "there is a place for parents."
- Invite parents to serve on broad policy-making committees and to participate in advisory groups.
- Provide activities that produce a climate in which positive communication can take place, such as potluck dinners, social hours, kite contests, etc.
- Send out survey forms to find out what kinds of classes would be interesting to parents and when convenient times would be for parents to attend those classes.
- Make sure that course titles are interesting and clearly describe course contents.
- Design and distribute attractive flyers, announcements and brochures for classes.
- Develop a biographical parent education staff list with information on skills and talents of various staff members.
- Collect and review other instructional materials from other programs. Find out what other successful programs have been doing.
- Enlist the news media — television, radio and newspapers — to assist in the dissemination of information.
- Distribute information about classes through every possible avenue — at supermarkets, in churches, public libraries.
- Use school sites or community facilities to hold classes whenever possible. This allows for closer school-community relationships and promotes social contact.
- Make every attempt to utilize class locations easily accessible to public transportation.

In addition to the above suggestions, a systematic cycle can be enormously helpful in reviewing plans for a parent education program. The phases to this cycle include:

- *Assessment* — Learning as much as you can about existing needs, materials, amounts of time, etc.
- *Development* — Utilizing your most effective staff, parents and other citizens to determine standards and guidelines.
- *Implementation* — Once a districtwide thrust has been agreed upon, begin implementation of the programs.
- *Evaluation* — Set up the design for evaluation at the beginning. Evaluation goes hand in hand with needs assessment.
- *Feedback/Modification* — Utilizing what we know and discovering major weaknesses on the district level, specialists and others ought to have a system for determining and disseminating those components that work under given circumstances.

There are several different models under which parent education programs can be approached, including:

- *Adult education model* — Under this model the traditional definition of adult education is broadened.
- *Specially-funded program model* — Using ESEA, Title I funds are used for parent education programs under this approach.
- *District-supported model* — This approach earmarks a portion of general purpose funds for districtwide parent education.
- *Privately-funded model* — Obtains a grant from an organization, foundation, etc., for a specially tailored parent education program.

Barriers to successful parent education programs must be recognized and dealt with. Barriers can include resistance on the part of educators to the widening domain of schools, lack of trained parent education leaders and teachers, working parents, scheduling, transportation, child care for other youngsters in the family and strained education budgets.

In time, virtually all parents can be reached in some way, and it is important to remember that effective parent involvement will not come about overnight. When parents find that they are welcomed, wanted and needed, they will participate.

In conclusion, I believe that parent education programs are a necessity. The need exists to have the skills required for good parenting available to all students prior to graduation from high school. Simultaneously, it is the responsibility of each school district to maintain opportunities for parents to develop and to improve their parenting skills. In this

manner, the future for successful education programs will be greatly enhanced by virtue of strengthening the skills of crucial members of the education team — the parents.

The Role of Public Schools in the Education of Parents

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What are the assumptions behind implementing parent education in the public schools? There is certainly an increasing interest in education among parents. They are showing up in schools and at school board meetings, and they are very vocal. However, what they are saying is not necessarily a request for parent education. Rather, it seems to me they are demanding that schools do a better job of educating their children. At the same time, I think parents feel inadequate and would welcome help with this awesome responsibility of parenthood. Parent education is thus a topic worthy of serious consideration. But it is essential that from the outset we have some agreement on the message. Erroneous assumptions usually lead planners astray.

In examining the feasibility of implementing parent education in the public schools, there are some basic questions that can assist us in reaching conclusions: What do parents need to know? When do they need to know it? To what extent can public schools meet these needs?

As a parent I received a great deal of help. Some of it came from the public schools, but those experiences I considered most valuable — the lectures by my obstetrician and my pediatrician, the cooperative nursery school our children attended and my experiences as a church school teacher — did not occur in a school setting. But for some it does. For example, teenage pregnancy, which may not be within a generally accepted scope of parent education, is a serious problem for the small number affected. Fortunately, a few school districts are addressing the problem with some degree of success.

I believe teenage pregnancy is one aspect of parent education where public schools may be the institution in the best position to help. Frequently the relationship between a teenage girl and her parents has already deteriorated, and school personnel may be the only ones showing concern. In addition, they can more easily enlist the cooperation of other agencies — something we are fond of talking about but do little to promote.

Another aspect of parent education is the involvement of parents in the preschool education of their children. For me, the most valuable part of nursery school was the opportunity to assist the teacher working directly with the children on a regularly scheduled basis. I was able to learn from a highly skilled, truly outstanding professional and to observe a large number of small children. A preschool program in the public schools has been available in the Rochester area for many years on a limited basis. There is a good parent education component, but it does not involve working directly with the children. However, changing the structure of the program is not the major obstacle to its expansion in New York. The obstacle is money. Currently, these

programs are voluntary and, except for minor costs, are financially self-supporting. Even though space is now available because of declining enrollments, the program is not growing. This situation is unlikely to change much unless New York State allocates state aid for 3- and 4-year-old children, which is unlikely because of New York's financial problems.

The phase of my experience as a church school teacher that proved so valuable to me as a parent occurred when the United Church of Christ introduced its new curriculum in the early 1960s. The seventh and eighth grade course, which I taught, included one session on sexual attitudes and values. The course provoked a very emotional discussion among the teachers, with the result that we eliminated it. The benefit for me was the discovery that I was emotionally prepared to discuss sexual attitudes and values. But it was not a pleasant experience for those who were not.

Several years later I was a member of the board of education when we introduced the sex education unit into the health curriculum. Health education was required by state law, but the sex education unit was permissive. Again, it provoked emotional discussion. Both the board and the community were divided. Eventually we adopted the unit with stipulations that it be voluntary — something we had never done for a unit of a required course — and that parents who wanted their children to participate must sign a written request. In spite of the problems we did make one significant improvement. For the first time all students were required to learn about the reproductive system — not just those enrolled in elective biology courses.

A few years ago my school district began weaving values education into the curriculum. Based on previous experiences, a concerted effort was made to involve and inform the community during the planning. As presently designed, sexual values are not included, nor is there any indication they ever will be. In my opinion parents are aware of their inadequacies when dealing with these values, but they are not willing to let schools or churches assume the responsibility. School boards are feeling besieged these days, so they are not seeking new responsibilities, particularly controversial ones. This leaves the matter where it has always been — in limbo. I would welcome some ideas on how implementing parent education might help to deal with this matter.

Earlier I noted that as a parent I had found some helpful experiences in the public schools. I was referring in particular to two kinds of program. Information meetings for parents were valuable for gaining an understanding of school programs, and back-to-school nights provided an opportunity to follow each child's schedule, meet the teachers and learn what they expected. Both kinds of program are essential; both were always well attended. It is probably unfortunate, but meetings concerned with general topics were less successful.

The public schools can do much to inform and help parents. I may be skeptical about the prospects for much change, but dim prospects do not discourage me. Plans are more likely to succeed if they are based on what people will do, rather than what people should do. So what seems desirable and possible?

First, I want to reiterate my belief that public schools can perform a valuable service by addressing the problem of teenage pregnancy.

Second, I want to restate my interpretation of what parents are saying — they want a better education for their children — because this interpretation is the basis for my suggestions about what can be done. I believe it is this concern for their children's education that provides the opening wedge to move in with programs that will help parents. School officials regularly and correctly complain that parents are shirking their responsibilities and transferring them to the schools. I think parents are in essence admitting this and with help would resume their responsibilities. It is this interest and willingness, which I sense is there, that I believe we can build on.

Third, I think the program should be voluntary. I would anticipate considerable resistance to a mandated program. Further, I have been through enough exercises where we wrote regulations to implement state and federal laws to make me question going this route. I continually point out to people with pet projects that the first section in regulations is definitions. I plead with them not to seek a law for a well-meaning purpose that contains terms we cannot define.

A voluntary program means it will have to be financed from local funds. In New York new programs fare no better at the local level than at the state level. I am not convinced large sums are needed, but finances are definitely a problem. A voluntary program could be designed to meet local needs. Some elements would be common to all school districts, but no single persons could meet the diverse needs of parents in New York's more than 700 school districts. A voluntary program would mean some districts would have no program.

It could also mean that parents who need it most might be precisely the ones who would not participate. We must accept these risks and try to overcome them through persuasion and encouragement.

While public schools can contribute much to the education of parents, their greatest contribution would be to give all children the kind of education they need to become successful, productive, worthy members of society. I can think of no better preparation for parenthood.

California's Program for Parent Education

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California's program for parent education and an allied program of infant development have been expanding in our high schools, particularly since 1974. Programs for infant care have existed since 1968 as part of California's child care services; programs for high school age parents and their infants have been a priority over the last four years. Our school-age parenting and infant development program is modeled after a program that was started in Berkeley several years ago with vocational education funding at one high school. That program had five basic principles:

- The infant center was part of a comprehensive high school.
- Parents had access to education including laboratory experiences at the infant center as an integral part of the program.
- Nonparents as well as parents were part of the program.
- There was a close association between the school's education program and the community's health and social services programs.
- The program had an educational base, eliminating any welfare stigma that might occur.

There was an initial legislative response to the program in 1974, and a conservative administration accepted and signed into law a bill that allowed for programs similar to Berkeley's to be implemented in 23 school districts and 30 high schools in California. In addition, we have seen the demand for the school-age parenting and infant development programs increasing each year, and California is currently spending more than $1 million of state funds for direct program support. There is every indication that the program will expand by another $1.2 million in 1978-79. We estimate that this expansion of over $2 million in the last four years will meet only 43 percent of the known need in school districts in our state.

Part of the reason for expansion is the tremendous success of the program. A recent evaluation showed that it has cut almost in half the number of school-age mothers who drop out before graduation. Prior to inception of the program, 7 out of 10 pregnant students enrolled in the districts participating in the program left before receiving their diplomas. Since the new program, the number has been cut to 4 out of 10. Sixty percent of the teenage mothers are continuing their education while receiving personal counseling and special courses such as parenting and child care. The survey also found that the program significantly increased the number of teenage mothers who found jobs or went on to college, and it sharply reduced the number dependent on welfare.

Most of the 30 programs that have been in existence operate on a strategy of sharing strengths and working together to solve common problems. The state

department of education brings together program participants, directors and other personnel to discuss concerns and issues such as:

- How to overcome the criticism of people in society who are against "sex education" and who believe that this type of program will increase teenage pregnancy and promiscuity.
- How to change the popular notion that these programs are only for low socioeconomic parents (statistics show that teenage pregnancy is evident in all socioeconomic segments of a society).
- How to overcome the assignment of these programs to continuation high schools or opportunity schools rather than to a comprehensive high school campus.
- How to develop a sound parent program for parents, pregnant girls and nonparents.
- How to use local school district funds for the parent education teacher in a comprehensive high school and make parent education a part of the regular secondary school curriculum.
- How to develop educational services in the program for parents, nonparents and infants?
- How to strengthen career education opportunities for the parents in order to develop a truly salable skill upon high school graduation?
- How to gain acceptance of an infant center as part of the comprehensive high school campus?

In this program as in most programs, the personalities of those involved can make the difference between success and failure. However, we have found that the greatest key to a success is the location of the infant development center. Programs that locate the infant development center at a comprehensive high school are most successful, and those with a community-operated or administered infant center adjacent to, across the street from, or within one block of a comprehensive high school are the next most successful. This is not to downplay the success of those programs operated on continuation high school campuses, or by community groups apart from a high school situation, or through California's Regional Occupation Programs and Centers (a regional vocational education structure). But the tie with a comprehensive high school seems to be critical in order for the goals of the program to be accomplished.

In California we are presently experiencing a strong interest by the legislature in parent education. Assemblyman John Vasconcellos has created a California Task Force on Positive Parenting: Recelebrating Families. The task force includes parents, nonparents, expectant parents and professional and lay persons affiliated and unaffiliated with public and private agencies, as well as state- and local-level officials. It is discussing a possible framework for making individuals and agencies aware of the need for parent education and a strong nurturing environment for infant development. The task force is developing a working document for legislative consideration and public discussion. It is also taking an inventory of all available resources on parenting and infant development, and reviewing the necessity to coordinate all available resources associated with parents. Those involved in the task force will be reviewing the research associated with child growth and development? Others will be enlisting the media in an awareness program for the public. One of the main strategies will be to secure commitments from local and state officials to address parenting and infant development; and, of course, one of the state-level activities will be the securing of support of the state legislature.

Now that California has had several years of experience in various locales and with different types of programs, I would like to set forth those factors we see as imperative for a good program:

- As previously stated, the location of the infant development center appears to be a key factor in the success of the program. Laboratory experiences for parents and nonparents as well as a nurturing environment at the comprehensive high school for the infants are necessary for program success.
- Any good program must have a sound curriculum including child growth and development, family and peer relations, health, nutrition, responsibility for one's life and one's decisions, and human sexuality.
- Any parent education program cannot rely solely upon the education system. It must have an extremely close tie with

the community and particularly any community child care, health, nutrition and social services programs.

- We all know that personnel most often signal the success of a program, and it is equally true with parenting and infant development. All personnel of the school, from the chief administrator to the custodian, must be totally accepting of this program.
- The personnel who become directly involved with parents, nonparents and infants must understand that most adolescent parents live in a crisis-oriented environment. Counseling must be provided, and counselors must also provide guidance regarding health, nutrition and social services. We have discovered that staff cannot act as if they were parents of the adolescents; nor can they tell young parents how to raise a child. Instead, they must provide daily child development activities that demonstrate their shared experiences — a matter of good training and behavior.
- Begin to develop programs at the junior high levels and coordinate these efforts with the senior high school programs. Statistics indicate that teenage pregnancy is increasing rapidly in the 12- to 14-year-old age range.

Further, I want to set forth a number of recommended strategies, some of which may or may not work at your local government level, state agency level or institution of higher education. However, if they are all present, it is my feeling that a program can be developed and continued with community support and be responsive to the needs of school-age parents and their infants.

- Responsibility for the program must be with the local school governing board and its superintendent. This responsibility must be accepted and include a recognition that parenting education is an integral part of the regular secondary school curriculum.
- The local school board and administration must seek and accept input from students (both parents and nonparents), as well as advice from all participating community and public agencies. If the desires of the students and the community are not taken into consideration, then a program such as this can easily fail because of divisiveness.
- There must be a program advisory committee, and the committee must function on an ongoing basis. There must be peer selection of representatives to the committee. No one group should be given an opportunity to dominate.
- The program must operate within the goals established by the local school board. However, it will not survive if program structure and methods are dictated in a set pattern for each comprehensive high school within a district. Naturally, this applies only to school districts with more than one high school. Each student population has its own needs, reflecting its own community; a useful advisory committee will consider these. There is absolutely no reason to sacrifice uniqueness among schools for the sake of central administrative convenience. At the same time, each comprehensive high school within the same district must be responsible and accountable to one local school board and one superintendent.
- A key strategy is for secondary schools to incorporate parent education and parenting competencies into their secondary curriculums. With so much discussion going on these days about competency-based education, there is no reason why parent education should not be given due consideration with all other areas of the curriculum.
- In many communities there is an opportunity to adjust, remodel or newly construct facilities. Whether the facility is new or undergoing remodeling, it must always meet the most rigid health and safety standards for infant programs. Also, many buildings are currently undergoing modification to accommodate new energy resources. During remodeling, it is a good time to take into consideration the possibility of constructing an infant development center, and it is an exceptionally good time to place the center in a comprehensive high school. As previously stated, an alternative to the location of an infant development center at a comprehensive high school is the placement of that center with a community group adjacent to or across the street from a comprehensive high school.
- A program of parent education cannot

survive on "soft" money. It is important for the district to recognize parent education as part of the regular curriculum, thereby employing a teacher for parent education from district resources. In discussion with parents and nonparents in our programs, the parents feel there should be some financial obligation on the part of the student parents. This obligation may be extremely minimal depending upon the financial capability of the family. The item most often mentioned as a parental responsibility is the provision of diapers. There are many other program costs that student parents feel should be their obligation, and any program should be flexible enough to accommodate these needs.

Briefly, I would like to indicate how different levels of government can assist a program such as this. All three levels, federal, state and local, can agree to a consistent program philosophy of a nurturing environment for infant development within an educationally-based program for parenting. Congress, state legislatures and local governing boards can keep this philosophy in mind as politics, statutes, rules, regulations and guidelines are developed for their respective programs.

The federal government can provide stability through adequate appropriations for nutrition, health and social services across all governmental agencies. The Administration can issue an Executive Order requiring common definitions and common eligibility requirements for participation in programs that affect school-age parents.

The states can include parent education for both parents and nonparents as part of the school apportionment of funds, treating it as a regular curriculum activity. In each state the teacher training institutions, both in their preservice and inservice programs, can recognize parent education as a part of the necessary secondary curriculum in the preparation of teachers. In addition to the provision of direct support funds for program operation, states can have a significant influence on infant development through standards for facilities and personnel licensing, as well as program standards.

The local government level must involve not only the local school board but city councils and county boards of supervisors. The infant development center, whether part of the comprehensive high school or part of a neighboring community program, will encounter ordinances from many governmental jurisdictions. In California we have seen local communities experience the impact of as many as 10 governmental agencies and their conflicting regulations. Therefore, the program's advisory committee needs staff and guidance in working with the various agencies at the local level to keep before these agencies the goals, objectives and needs of the program. Local governmental agencies will always be asked for financial support, but such financial support can be wasted unless a well-coordinated program is implemented. Intergovernmental consistency and cooperation can sometimes be of greater assistance to a program than a few dollars.

In summary, the program must always address the educational, nutritional, health and social needs of the school-age parent and the parent education needs of parents and nonparents, as well as infant development in a nurturing environment. The program advisory committee must communicate its needs to local boards and to the state and federal governments. I am confident that school districts and community organizations can operate successful programs if they base them upon a consistent philosophy. The priorities for success are to place the high school parents and their infants first, the local school district or agency second, the state agency third and the federal government last. As public servants, I challenge all of us not to confuse or reorder these priorities.

Issues in Disseminating Parent Knowledge and Skills

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Child care in the United States has always been the responsibility of the natural family. Rural and small town America depended upon the family, including grandparents, aunts and uncles, for models of how to rear and care for the child. These models passed by visible example from generation to generation, and usually two generations (parents and grandparents) at the minimum were engaged in these activities. The routines of living involved everyone in a daily tempo of shared activity. Young children helped draw water and bring wood or coal indoors for the morning cooking, while older children had chores of caring for the family, cow, pigs and chickens. Parents and grandparents taught children at an early age how to do the gardening, canning, sewing, cooking, carpentry and so forth. Through these lessons important cognitive and affective concepts were learned, and children were valued both for the joy they brought and for the help they provided. The work roles of both the mother and the father overlapped considerably; both role models were readily available for the child. The family was a large organic group that required cooperation and participation of all its members. Through this cooperation and participation, parenting occurred as a natural process, generation after generation.

Now that is all changed. Industrialization and post-industrialization have had a sharp impact on the family. By the 1950s the norm had become the nuclear family with parents and first generation offspring. Under these conditions, the mother carried the bulk of the parenting role since the father was gone during much of the day and was involved in an occupation external to the home place. Though parenting was placed more heavily upon the female, she was typically not burdened with a job outside the home and may have lived in close proximity to her parents or her spouse's parents. Thus, advice on parenting could be available.

The continuing trend since the 1950s has been toward greater involvement of the female in the formal occupational structure outside the home as well as greater mobility of nuclear families. This has reduced the time available for either parent to engage in parenting tasks with children, and it has decreased the likelihood that other extended family members will be geographically near to assist in these tasks. The increased numbers of single-parent families, which has been a striking demographic trend since 1970, has increased the burden of parenthood for single adults and added to what is now becoming a national crisis in providing for the care of children.

Such social forces establish an urgent need for parent education. But there are important issues to be studied in how best to proceed. The success of the American educational system in providing education on basic skills, or

education in less traditional areas such as driver's education or drug education, has been mixed and uneven. Traditionally, the pace of innovation and change in educational systems has been slow and deliberate. A better understanding of how educational innovations are diffused, adopted and utilized is important for the success of any venture into parent education.

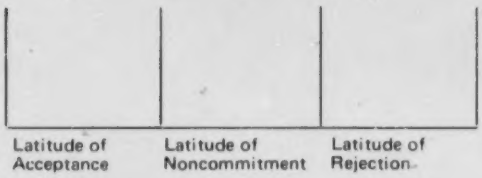
During the past two decades, work in a variety of disciplines has made it increasingly clear that the process has certain universal characteristics. In its most simple form, diffusion is a process through which knowledge about innovation is communicated to potential users. Stated another way, through diffusion innovations are coupled with market need. Various promotional and communication strategies are utilized to spur the use of innovations, including salesmen, advertisements, reviews in professional journals, professional meetings, staff training and word-of-mouth communication. The approach used for a particular innovation is determined at least in part by the cost of the innovation, its complexity, the degree of novelty and the characteristics of potential adopters. In general, the diffusion process includes five types of activities:

- Making potential users aware of the innovation (AWARENESS).
- Creating an interest in the innovation on the part of potential adopters (INTEREST).
- Getting potential adopters to evaluate the innovation (EVALUATION).
- Getting potential adopters to test the product (TRIAL).
- Getting potential adopters to use innovation routinely (ADOPTION). (Rogers, 1962)

An additional item frequently considered to be a sixth diffusion activity is to make sure that adopters of the innovation do not discontinue using the innovation (INSTITUTIONALIZATION).

Acceptance of an innovation involves a complex cycle of social factors that come under the general heading of attitude formation and change. Elements in this cycle include the nature of the innovation, how it is communicated to groups and individuals, the existence of any initial attitudes toward the innovation and the nature of these attitudes. Existing attitudes may be conceptualized through three basic categories: the latitude of acceptance, the latitude of noncommitment and the latitude of rejection, as portrayed in the figure below:

Figure 1. The Attitude Judgmental Field[1]



[1]Sherif, C., M. Sherif and R. Nebergall, *Attitude and Attitude Change*. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1965.

In general, the more important the object or situation is to the individual, the greater will be the latitude of rejection and the smaller the latitude of acceptance. Such attitudes are the ones that most clearly define an individual's identity and the ones most resistant to change. Conversely, objects or situations that are peripheral to an individual's concerns have a large latitude of noncommitment and correspondingly smaller latitude of rejection and acceptance. If an innovation concerns such an attitude where the person has low involvement, attitude change may come quite easily and quite radical changes are tolerated. For example, if the typical elementary teacher is told that fluorescent lighting is superior to incandescent, positive acceptance of change would probably be forthcoming. Even radical changes, such as colored lights or individual lighting for each student would probably be tolerated. But if the innovation concerns an area of central concern to the teacher, change becomes far more problematic. In the same way, if the innovation is an area of central concern to the learner, the likelihood of change is lessened. Parent education seems to be characterized as a change of this order rather than a change that is peripheral to the identity of the person. Thus, parent education will prove to be a more difficult concept for innovation and diffusion than a simple technological change in the environment of the teacher or the learner.

Some Critical Research Findings

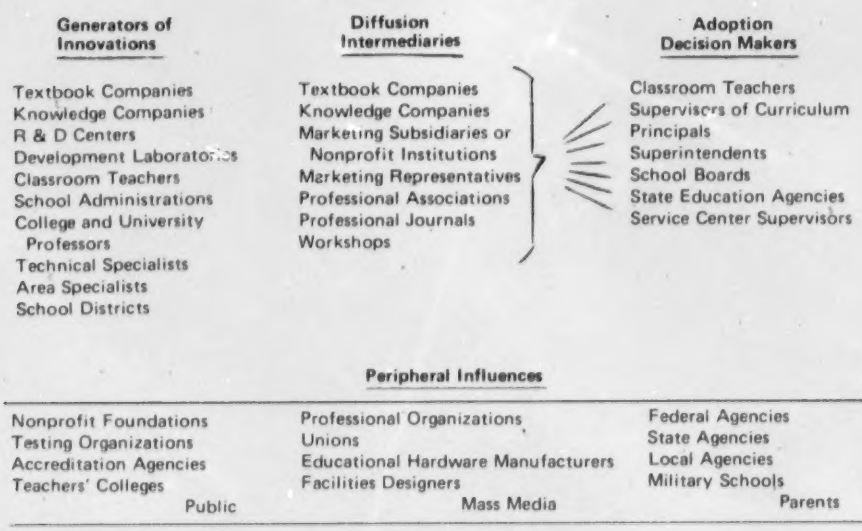
Summarized below are some of the more

important research findings regarding factors that influence the adoption process.

- The more revolutionary the concept, the greater the difficulty in achieving adoption.
- The greater the amount of change in learner behavior that is required to adopt the innovation, the less the probability of adoption.
- The innovation must be designed in such a way that the innovator can easily justify adoption to the other members of his social system.
- Actual experience with the innovation is the most effective way to secure adoption.
- Awareness of the innovation is most effectively promoted by mass media.
- Word-of-mouth communication between adopters and potential adopters is most effective in legitimizing the innovation and convincing the learner to try the new innovation.
- Social status and trustworthiness of the information source influence acceptance of the information.

Factors influencing the way innovations are diffused and adopted are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Central Influences



Summary

Parent education is an educational practice that may prove to be central to the learner and the teacher. One way to facilitate adoption would be to develop incentives for both teachers and learners. A fairly direct incentive would be to give awards to teachers for outstanding achievement in parent education. Incentives for the learner may be more difficult to find, especially since child-rearing is seen as the individual responsibility and obligation of the family in this society. Regardless of the incentive system that might be developed, it is clear that incentives for change in education are extraordinarily weak compared to other organizations and institutions in society. Without incentives parent education will be difficult to achieve.

Parent Education: Needed Characteristics and Necessary Concerns

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There has been legitimate concern in this country about "who's raising the children." There should be equal concern about "who's helping us learn to raise the children." For just as methods of child-rearing have changed, so have our ways of learning to be mothers and fathers. And all too often, help in the form of knowledge, advice, suggestions and support is not available when we need it most. The time has come for an expanded effort to make parent education available and attractive to all who are or will be parents. In this paper I will discuss potential barriers to that process, as well as some characteristics of parent education that can help avoid or remove those barriers. In all these remarks, the problems and concerns are not confined to parent education under the auspices of the public schools, but pertain to parent education regardless of the agency or institution that delivers it.

Characteristics Essential for Successful Expansion of Parent Education

Three characteristics are essential if we wish to expand existing public school efforts in parent education at all levels. First, the concept of parent education should be kept broad. Second, it should be as diverse as are the families and communities in this country. Third, it should be firmly rooted in reality.

Parent education is sometimes accused of being vague and ill-defined. It may serve us better to think of it as being broad, encompassing many different goals, approaches and populations. It should be broad in several senses. First, it is not for the poor alone, or only for minority groups or for families with special needs, or just for those families whose children are having trouble in school. Most families, at one time or another, can benefit. According to a recent national survey, some 90 percent of parents would appreciate "help to make the job easier" (Yankelovich, Shelley and White, 1977, p. 27).

Parent education must be kept broad in the sense that it includes the emotional, social and physical aspects of child-rearing and family life — and not just the cognitive, school-type tasks, as is the current tendency. While family concerns for the educational progress of children may be the most logical entry point, such concern is inextricably linked to other aspects of child and family development. Keeping these interrelationships firmly in mind will help us to understand the high emotional content of family life and the effect it has upon parent/child interaction. The cool, rational problem-solving approaches that seem so simple in the abstract sometimes appear quite different and irrelevant in the social and emotional context of the family.

Parent education must also be kept broad in that it recognizes the developmental stages of families and children. The mother and father of a firstborn child in kindergarten or first grade are quite different from that

mother and father when their second or third comes along. The bewildered parents of a bewildered adolescent are different still. Most parents are familiar with the common phenomenon of "burn-out" — you read *Parents Magazine* conscientiously for a year or attend parent-teacher meetings for two or three, only to find that soon everything seems like a rerun. It is significant that most parent education efforts have been aimed at parents with young children (Brim, 1965), even though the problems of parenthood do not decrease with the family's and the child's increasing age. We need much more research and development on how to retain and meet the needs and interests of families as their children mature and start a new generational cycle.

Implicit in the need for a broad perspective is an imperative to keep parent education diverse. We should make available varying levels of support, different types of information and skills, and we should make these available in different ways so as to individualize them. Not every parent needs to come to meetings, work in the classroom or attend parent discussion groups. Parent education may range all the way from simply providing a place for parents to discuss their trials and tribulations, thus gaining the "you are not alone" type of support necessary to face the next crisis or fully enjoy the next pleasure, to a fairly high level of support such as a weekly home visit or a coordinated effort among several agencies.

Parent education must be diverse in the sense that where other services are available — through institutions, agencies, informal information and support systems — they become part of the total effort. The schools can become closer not only to families, but to other human service providers in the community. Historically, parent education has taken many forms and used many types of deliveries. This may be its greatest strength as we work to build public acceptance. Just as schools cannot do their job with children without parents, they cannot work with parents without other community resources.

Another characteristic of parent education must be realism. The realities of modern family life are often quite different from our idealized picture of what they should be. The changes that have come about are not confined to any socioeconomic, cultural or ethnic group; they are across the board. Parent education programs must recognize, for example, that most women and men work away from home; that the day care center and the baby sitter are as much a part of many children's lives as mom and dad; and that while vast numbers of our 12- to 15-year-old girls are having children, another large group is postponing parenthood until their careers are well established, or indefinitely. Through the efforts of the U.S. Office of Education, the Administration for Children, Youth and Families, and other public and private agencies, we are learning more about the adolescent mother, father and child. Is there a possibility that the many couples who have their first child after several years of "doing their own thing" may have their own unique parent education needs as well as strengths?

We must also recognize that many parents of all ages and backgrounds are as much or more concerned with their own self-fulfillment as they are with that of their children. The self-sacrificing parent is no longer the ideal. While the change may enhance family and child welfare, it is just as likely to conflict with it. The problems that often result are well documented in our own lives and those of our neighbors. I doubt that we will turn back the clock.

We must also be realistic in what we expect parent education to accomplish. Parents and teachers often expect more of parent education than it can deliver, and we can ill afford more disillusionment connected with education, particularly the education of young children and their parents. The many social, economic and personal problems that beset parents cannot be solved by parent education. Parents with the best of intentions, adequate knowledge, love, affection and all the other attributes we consider desirable in parents can still be totally overwhelmed by adverse circumstances. Parent education will not prevent poverty, discrimination, overwhelming social change or marital discord. Modest claims for what it can do for the quality of life of children and parents — and the possible benefits to schools and society — should be attractive enough. Some of the preventive aspects of parent education have been outlined in a previous ECS publication (*Education for Parenthood* 1976).

Realistically, we must make sure that teachers, administrators and the school as a whole understand and can take advantage of the benefits to them of parent education. With declining enrollments and shifting social priorities, a political alliance of schools and parents is a necessity. In fact, it may be one of the best things schools have going for them. There are other less obvious benefits. One kindergarten teacher I know has put together on her own a small parent education program simply for reasons of efficiency — she cannot answer, individually, all the concerns that parents come to her with. And speaking as a teacher, I know there is no better way to create understanding and empathy than through a parent education program that brings parents directly into the classroom. Any parent who has helped a roomful of 3- and 4-year-old children put on boots, mittens, snow suits, caps and scarves to venture out into a Colorado snow will never again complain about a stuck zipper or a cap on backwards. Teachers and teaching also benefit from a better understanding of parents — and through them, the children. Most teachers can benefit from the insights teachers in parent "co-op" preschools or Head Start programs have as they get acquainted with parents and children together.

Emerging Trends

Many programs are beginning to use a systematic planning process that involves assessment of needs and involvement of families and parents in design and decision making. The results from two large-scale assessments (Education Commission of the States, 1973; Appalachia Educational Laboratory, 1975) indicated that parents asked for just about the same topics that parent education covered in the past — knowledge of child growth and development; helping children learn how to get along with others, attain self-confidence, handle anger and other problems; making sure children are physically well, plus many others. The important thing is that parents were asked.

Parental and cultural values are being given greater credence. This may make parent education more difficult than it was when most of us accepted without question an authority's conception of exemplary child rearing. What does a parent educator do when some parental practices obviously conflict with the good of the child, as in the case of severe physical punishment, haphazard eating patterns, or late night or excessive television?

Parents are receiving more direct training in relevant and specific child-rearing skills than they did in years past, when general psychological and developmental theories appeared to dominate parent education. However, either approach has its limitations. General theoretical approaches may increase parents' understanding of their children, but still leave them wondering what to do in a particular situation. Many skills and tricks of the trade may, if applied without any conception of the general principles on which they are based, leave parents in possession of only a "bag of tricks" inadequate for the complexities of child-rearing. Ideally, knowledge of child development and psychological theories leads into training and practice in what the implications are for child rearing so that the two complement each other.

Motivation is being recognized as a critical element. Simple access to information is seldom sufficient, for in child-rearing, as in so many other things, that which we would, we do not.

There is increasing concern for all who assume the functions of parents — child care personnel, foster parents, grandparents and older children, as well as biological parents. Young children in group care need mothering and fathering as much as any children. Moreover, we are beginning to recognize the long-range and sustained nature of parent education. It is not something done to get you through the "terrible 2's," or as a parenthood course in high school, or merely to help your youngster succeed in school. It is any and all of those things, and it is much more.

Schools all over the country are already involved in many forms of parent education, most of it on a small scale. Children, families, schools and society will be well served by an expansion of these efforts, but there are potential barriers that may need to be avoided or removed.

Potential Barriers

If there is a sense within this country that families, schools and communities are expressing both a need for and a receptivity to parent education, what are the barriers to implementation? Which are real barriers and which are

not? We can classify the barriers as political, technical, communication and social.

As in every area of social policy, politics is crucial. Local public schools may wish to be responsive to the parent education needs of their patrons, but if legislative, administrative, organizational or financial barriers cannot be overcome, schools will give up before they begin. Even if laws and regulations allow and encourage parent involvement and education, there must be district and building administrative support. If we educate teachers and parent educators, we must also educate principals and superintendents. In many cases the most difficult barrier will be financial, not because resources are unavailable but because priorities are elsewhere.

Barriers relating to our technical abilities to foster parental and family competence can be overcome, but not quickly. These technical barriers include a lack of trained and experienced personnel, and a lack of materials and methods appropriate for using with families, particularly those with preschool and elementary-school-age children. There is no shortage of suggested activities, but many of these are simply school-like activities done at home. Activities developed for classrooms tend to dominate the parent involvement and education components even of early childhood programs such as Home Start, Head Start and parent demonstration projects.

We need additional research and development on how to foster and in some cases teach what can be done at home to promote children's learning and development. But before that can happen we need to identify what can perhaps be done best and only by the home. There is some information (Gordon, 1977), certainly enough to proceed on. The technical barriers arise because the things we are teaching parents to do with their children are not long-lasting shared experiences such as discussing problems at the dinner table, cooking together, reading together and sharing trips into the community. Rather, they focus on specific skills the children are to master, such as learning concepts, reading, math skills, etc. Perhaps these are an essential first step for parents who want to help their children learn, but there may be more important things for parents to do, particularly in the few short hours that employed parents have with their children. For example, reading to and with children may be far more important to children's success in reading than having parents teach phonics.

Technical barriers are also evident in our inability to use television and radio to promote positive family, parent and child development. Local stations in local large school districts have developed programs that have reached limited audiences, several large-scale federal and foundation efforts are in process, others have begun and been abandoned. None have had much national impact. At the same time, commercial television is one of our most effective family educators, teaching parents and children about nutrition, toys, sex roles, instant problem-solving and the cultural and social values of our society. Watch a group of young children involved in dramatic play, or a parent and child pushing a grocery cart down the breakfast cereal or soft drink aisles in a supermarket. Most of them have learned television's lessons all too well.

Communication barriers refer to the information or knowledge that parents and parent educators need in order to make intelligent decisions. Parents and parent educators need information about the status of families and children in this country and knowledge of what other people and agencies engaged in similar enterprises are doing, as well as information on child development, family management and child-rearing. Imaginative parent education programs are being implemented throughout the country under the auspices of a variety of formal and informal structures, but they appear to be unevenly available to parents. Furthermore, there are communication barriers among the agencies, institutions and groups involved in parent education. Although it is true that the familiar territorial impulse is heightened by scarce resources, school involvement in parent education is unlikely to lessen the need for family education services from any of these other groups. There is plenty of work to go around, as has been vividly illustrated in child abuse efforts. Interestingly, for many years we have been trying to get schools to be more concerned with parents — to involve, consult and educate them more. It would be ironic if opposition from other agencies developed as they began to do just that. But perhaps that is more of a political barrier than anything else.

Barriers relating to social values have never been very honestly confronted in parent education (Brim, 1965). We have to face the fact that there is no such thing as the ideal parent in any culture. If we can do this then some of the barriers may be overcome — and many will prove to be nonexistent. I remember being told by an anthropologist in pre-Head Start days that the Spanish-background parents in our small town would never consent to enrolling children in a special preschool program because the social and cultural barriers were too great. I was told a few years later that they would not consent to having a home visitor enter their homes once a week as part of a parent education program. In neither case did these predictions prove true. Potential barriers may not come tumbling down, but they certainly are not insurmountable, particularly if we avoid mandates, rigidity and narrow conceptions of parent education.

Voluntary parent education programs, designed with the help of parents to meet the needs of today's parents, can enhance any program that works with children, whether those are young children in a preprimary program or adolescents who are themselves preparing to be parents. I have identified some characteristics and emerging trends that will help overcome potential barriers to implementation as well as some problems that need additional study and development. Decision makers in the education community, concerned with "basics," would do well to regard parent education as one of those basics.

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